Presented to
Grace Theological Seminary
By
University of Oregon
1939

UU5
W 623

Seminary UU5 W623 c.1
Whyte, Alexander, 18 110105 000
The duty of prayer; illustrate
3 9311 00025022 1
GRACE COLL/SEM-MORGAN LIBRARY

GRACE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/dutyofprayer0000reva

THE

DUTY OF PRAYER

ILLUSTRATED AND RECOMMENDED

FROM SCRIPTURE,

AND FROM THE OPINIONS AND CONDUCT OF UNINSPIRED PERSONS.

From the Second Aberdeen Edition.

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER WHYTE, A.M.

MINISTER OF FETTERCAIRN,

AUTHOR OF "THE HERITAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE," "THE LORD'S SUPPER," &C. &C.

PITTSBURGH:
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION.
1865.

U U5
V6 3
3223

ELECTROTYPED BY L. JOHNSON & CO., PHILA.

PRINTED BY W. S. HAVEN, PITTSBURGH

PREFACE.

THE writer of the following pages has long entertained a belief that if people could be prevailed upon to pray, this would be the shortest and surest way of overcoming their dislike to religion and bringing them to Christ for salvation, and that it is the duty of every one, whatever be his place in society, to use all the means in his power both to cultivate devotional habits himself and to urge others to do the same. Part of the effects of this belief is the humble attempt to promote the interests of piety, now submitted to the public.

The plan differs from that of every other work on Prayer with which the author is acquainted. A great portion of it is composed of extracts from the word of God, and from the writings of uninspired authors. The uninspired extracts contain the sentiments of many of the most eminent theological writers of the first five and last three centuries of the Christian era,—a class of men whose studies, habits, and character certainly entitle them

to be heard, on such a subject as this, with some degree of deference. They also contain the opinions of many laymen of celebrity in philosophy, literature, law, and medicine, and of persons distinguished by piety and intelligence in various other departments of life. Infidels, who have lived in Christian countries and have insensibly participated in the social advantages of Christianity, and also heathens, who have lived in the "dark places of the earth," on which the light of the gospel never shone, here likewise yield their testimony in behalf of prayer. Friends and foes, both in ancient and modern times, both in civilized and barbarous states of society, here, in their several ways and according to their several degrees of light, admit and support the rights of religion. The voice of all is for prayer.

To many, such an attempt as this may be more acceptable than works of severer reasoning and higher pretensions. With a great proportion of mankind, names make a deeper impression than formal demonstrations. Nay, the authority of men of undoubted piety and penetration has, and ought to have, much weight even with persons of decidedly intellectual habits, as it tends to give them the more confidence in the soundness of their own conclusions.

When persons of the most opposite creeds and practices, as in the case before us, and of almost all shades of opinion, and all countries and ages of the world, but most of them eminent in some department or other of human inquiry, all appear united in their sentiments regarding the obligation of prayer in some form or other, it certainly amounts to a strong presumption of the truth. No number of names, it is true, however great and respectable they may be, can prove that to be right which is really wrong. But when such names, and the general current of opinion among the reflecting part of mankind, are all in favour of a practice which opposes the natural depravity of the heart and the influence of outward temptations, the evidence for prayer becomes so strong that, on the ordinary principles of reasoning, there is no possibility of resisting its force; and yet even this acquires additional effect from the consideration that some of the most remarkable testimonies are here borne by men of notoriously irreligious habits, who could not be accused of partiality to such a practice.

Still, the evidence would be incomplete without higher authority than that of man. On this account, every sentiment which is here pressed on

the reader's acceptance is brought to the test of God's word, and nothing is recommended which is not fully warranted by it.

In some part or other of the arrangement, the writer has endeavoured to include all the most important views of prayer, and to connect them with the leading and essential doctrines of the gospel. That he has given to each of these doctrines such a place, or to any of them such a prominency, as may meet with the approbation of every reader, is what he does not pretend to. But he can confidently affirm that he has uniformly aimed at what he believed to be a right distribution of scriptural truths, and the enforcing of scriptural principles in such a way as seemed to him most likely to produce conviction and lead to devotional habits.

* * * * * * *

With these explanations, he now commits the following pages to God's all-wise disposal, praying that they may go forth with the divine blessing, and may be the means of bringing, at least, some who may be far off, nigh to Christ.

FETTERCAIRN MANSE, *December*, 1854.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

SECTION I.—What is Prayer?..... 13
II.—To whom should we Pray?..... 16

CHAPTER II.

Why should we Pray?..... 41
SECTION I.—We should Pray, because God has commanded us to do so..... 41
1. In language the most explicit..... 41
2. In institutions the most expressive 44
SECTION II.—We should Pray, because nature prompts us to it, This is evident, 52
1. From its being agreeable to reason, the light of nature..... 53
2. From the impulse to Pray, which we feel in situations of danger, &c..... 57
From the devotional practices of mankind, both in civilized and barbarous states of society... 60
4. From the confessions and acts of the unbelieving and ungodly themselves..... 71
SECTION III.—We should Pray, because to be permitted to do so is a most precious and honourable privilege. 83
1. It is precious; because nothing that man could have done could have procured it, and the blood and intercession of Christ alone secured it for us..... 84

PAGE

2. It is honourable; because there is something in its very nature pure and ennobling; it unites us, in act and feeling, with the highest and holiest of beings, and is the nearest approach to the Almighty, and, therefore, the greatest honour allowed to man, in this sinful world... 92

SECTION IV.—We should Pray; because it is useful to do so. 105

1. As a test by which we may ascertain our spiritual state..... 106
2. As a check to sin, and incitement to duty, in all situations..... 111
3. As a support and comfort under all the trials of life..... 121
4. As an action of the mind in which there is true happiness..... 127
5. As a preparation for the felicity of heaven..... 133
6. As the medium appointed by God for conveying his blessings to us..... 137

CHAPTER III.

For what should we Pray?..... 143

We should Pray for nothing against, but for every thing agreeable to, the Divine will: particularly for—

1. The gift of the Holy Ghost to teach us..... 145
2. Pardon of sin through Jesus Christ..... 149
3. Sanctification and preparation for heaven..... 153
4. Such a share of this world's advantages as may be for God's glory, and our own good, and that of others.... 159
5. All these blessings also to others..... 165

CHAPTER IV.

How should we Pray?..... 177

1. With Humility..... 177
2. With Faith..... 182
3. With Earnestness..... 187
4. With Gratitude..... 193
5. With Benevolence..... 199

PAGE
6. With Frequency and Perseverance, generally..... 203
Particularly, 1. In Public Prayer..... 210
2. In Family Prayer..... 216
3. In Private Prayer..... 225

CHAPTER V.

By what means may we learn to Pray, if yet strangers to that duty, or improve in it, if we have already learned?..... 237
We must look to, and depend upon, the Holy Spirit, who alone can teach us to pray aright, and with acceptance; while, at the same time, we must use the ordinary means given us, and generally blessed with success, when used as they should be, such as:—
1. Frequent and Serious Meditation..... 238
2. Scriptural forms of Prayer..... 244
3. The Advice and Example of experienced worshippers..... 250
4. Guarding against every kind of sin..... 258

CHAPTER VI.

What are the pretences most commonly used for neglecting Prayer?..... 262
1. A wrong view of God's attributes..... 262
2. Disinclination to Pray, and want of comfort in Prayer, 270
3. Want of abilities to perform the duty aright..... 275
4. The want of time to pray..... 279
5. A wrong contrast between the characters of the Praying and the Prayerless..... 287

CHAPTER VII.

What are the real causes of the neglect of Prayer?..... 304
The radical cause is an evil heart. The secondary causes are—
1. Ungodly Education..... 304
2. Timidity, or Want of Decision of Mind..... 312
3. Worldly-Mindedness..... 326

CONCLUDING ADDRESSES.

PAGE
1. To those who neglect and despise the duty of Prayer..... 337
2. To those who are wavering or undecided regarding it..... 340
3. To those who rest satisfied with the mere form, &c..... 347
4. To those who "worship in spirit and in truth"..... 347
5. Prayer on the Concluding Addresses..... 350

THE

DUTY OF PRAYER

ILLUSTRATED AND RECOMMENDED.

In the following attempt to plead the cause of piety, it is proposed, in humble dependence on the divine blessing, to inquire, What is prayer; and to whom we should pray? Why we should pray? For what we should pray? How we should pray? By what means we may learn to pray, if yet prayerless; or improve in it, if we have already learned? What are the most common pretences and the real causes for neglecting prayer?

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS PRAYER, AND TO WHOM ARE WE TO OFFER IT?

Section 1.—*What is Prayer?*

"Prayer is no other than the thoughts of a devout mind ascending silently to God, or audibly expressed."[1]

---

[1] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 144.

"It is simply a raising of the soul to God, and an expressing to him of its desires and feelings."[2] In other words, "want felt, and help desired, with faith to obtain it, is prayer."[3] "In its very nature, it is the expression of dependence, indigence, desire, and expectation."[4] "It is a simple, unfeigned, humble, and ardent offering of the heart before God, wherein we either ask things needful, or give thanks for benefits received."[5] "It is the application of want to Him who only can relieve it; the voice of sin to Him who only can pardon it. It is not eloquence, but earnestness; not the definition of helplessness, but the feeling of it; not figures of speech, but compunction of soul. It is the 'Lord save us, we perish,' of drowning Peter; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy."[6] "It is the offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies."[7]

It has been remarked that "our English word *Prayer* is too strait; for that properly signifies petition, or request; whereas, humble adorations of God, and thanksgiving to him, are as necessary in prayer as any other part of it."[8] But "in its usual latitude of acceptance, it comprehends all sorts of devotion, or all that part of religious practice, wherein we do immediately address ourselves to God, having by speech, oral or mental, a

---

[2] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vii. 7.

[3] Adam's Private Thoughts, edit. 1821, p. 254.

[4] Scott's Essays, edit. 5th, p. 379.

[5] Bradford, quoted in Bickersteth on Prayer, edit. 10th, p. 2.

[6] Hannah More, quoted in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 5.

[7] Shorter Catechism, Question 98.

[8] Henry on Prayer, edit. 1819, p. 1.

kind of intercourse or conversation with him."[9] "It is taken for the address of a creature on earth, to God in heaven, about every thing that concerns his God, his neighbour, or himself, in this world or the world to come. It is that converse which God hath allowed us to maintain with him above while we are here below."[10]

Prayer, to correspond with the various subjects to which it refers, has been divided into many parts; such as "invocation," or calling upon God to hear what is addressed to him; "adoration," or a reverential acknowledging of the perfections of his nature and the wonders of his working; "confession," or a humble, sincere, and penitential owning of the sins and follies which we have committed; "petition," or an earnest asking for whatever the soul desires, to remove its pains and supply its wants; "pleading," or stating our reasons for offering up our requests, and for entertaining hopes that they will be granted; "profession, or self-dedication," in which we renounce all selfish and sinful views, and give up, or dedicate, ourselves entirely to God; "thanksgiving," or an expressing of our gratitude for the manifold mercies which we have received; and "blessing,"[11] or ascribing all honour and excellence to God through Jesus Christ, who alone can make our prayers acceptable. To illustrate these different parts of prayer, many examples might be quoted from Scripture. But, as this is not necessary for our present purpose, we may only observe that there prayer is termed "drawing near to God,"[12] lifting up our souls to him,[13] pouring out our hearts

[9] Barrow's Serm. 1 Thess. v. 17.
[10] Watts on Prayer, edit. 8, p. 1.
[11] Ibid. edit. 8, p. 3.
[12] Ps. lxxiii. 28.
[13] Ps. xxv.

before him,[14] asking, seeking, knocking,[15] and all in the name of Christ.[16]

It thus appears that prayer is a turning of the soul to God, in its distresses to implore help, in its enjoyments to express gratitude, and in all circumstances to rest upon him and converse with him as its only support and supreme good. From all this it is evident that true prayer and true religious feelings are so identified as to be inseparable; and whatever illustrates and recommends the one does, by necessary consequence, also illustrate and recommend the other.

This is assumed as an admitted fact, in the following pages; and hence many quotations originally applied by their authors to religion generally are therein applied to prayer particularly.

Section 2.—*To whom should we pray?*

"It is evident that the Being whom all men are to worship must be everywhere present, have all power, and know all things."[1] "The end of prayer is to obtain deliverance, or preservation, from evil, or the possession and continuance of good. Our supplication, therefore, must be made to Him who is the almighty source of every good and perfect gift." Hence it follows that "God alone can, on account of his essential perfections, be the object of true prayer." But, "to follow exactly the Scripture plan, as we ought to do, the tenor of our prayers should be generally addressed to the Father, in dependence on the merit and intercession of the Son and

---

[14] Ps. lxii. 8.
[15] Matt. vii. 7.
[16] John xv. 16.
[1] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 56.

the influence and grace of the Holy Spirit."[2] "The object of prayer is the Godhead in three persons. The address to each is in their covenant offices; and the petitions to each should be according as they stand related to sinners in those offices."[3] That relation is expressed in Scripture in these terms:—"Through Jesus Christ we have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father."[4] It is clear, therefore, that "the proper and peculiar object of divine worship and invocation is the essence of God," which "is common to all the three persons,"[5] that "religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to him alone."[6]

The worship of the Father is implied in every part of Scripture, and directly expressed in innumerable passages, especially in these three:—"O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come;"[7] "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me;"[8] "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."[9]

The following quotations also show that the Son must receive similar homage. "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him."[10] "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."[11] "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that

---

2 Venn's Duty of Man, ed. 1824, pp. 257–259.
3 Romaine's Life of Faith, ed. 1821, pp. 98, 99.
4 Eph. ii. 18. 5 Owen on Communion, ed. 1808, pp. 307, 308.
6 Confession of Faith, chap. xxi. 2.
7 Ps. lxv. 2. 8 Luke xxii. 42. 9 Luke xxiii. 46.
10 Heb. i. 6. 11 John v. 22, 23.

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[12] "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."[13]

That we must honour, in like manner, the Holy Spirit, is manifest from every part of the Bible, in which the attributes and operations of God are ascribed to him. The reverence which is due to him, indeed, seems to be more strictly guarded and more awfully enforced than that of either the Father or the Son. Of this our Saviour's words are an evidence: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."[14] Another evidence is the sudden vengeance which came down, after the apostle's reproof, on Ananias and Sapphira. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost."[15] The same judgment also fell on Sapphira, his wife, for the same sin. Now, it is to be remarked that the Holy Ghost, being here expressly called God, and his honour being defended with so much jealousy and its violation punished with such promptitude and solemnity, must evidently be as much entitled to divine worship as the Father and the Son are.

The worship of the whole three is both implied and expressed in the rite of baptism. These are the words

---

[12] Phil. ii. 9–11. [13] Acts vii. 59. [14] Matt. xii. 31.
[15] Acts v. 3–5.

of the institution: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[16] The same thing is equally manifest from the benediction of the inspired apostle: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." Amen.[17]

Still, the whole three are but one God; for "there is none other God but one;"[18] and therefore we must worship them as one; "for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."[19]

This doctrine, though nominally professed, is virtually set aside, by the Church of Rome, in its worship of saints and angels,—a practice so much at variance with Scripture and common sense, that it is most surprising how any one, in a sober state of mind, could receive it as an article of faith or duty; and yet it rests on the highest human authority which that church recognizes. The creed of Pope Pius IV., and the decree of the Council of Trent, contain, to this day, the recognized standard of faith and conduct, on this point, among all true Romanists.

Pius IV. said, "I do firmly hold that the saints, who reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and invoked, and that they do offer up prayers to God for us."[20] The Tridentine Fathers said, "The Holy Synod commands all bishops and others sustaining the office and charge of teaching, that they diligently instruct the faithful, con-

[16] Matt. xxviii. 19.
[17] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.
[18] 1 Cor. viii. 4.
[19] Matt. iv. 10.
[20] Archbishop Tillotson's sermon, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

cerning the intercession of saints, invocation, honour of relics, and lawful use of images, according to the practice of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, received from the earliest times of the Christian Church, and the consent of the Holy Fathers, and decrees of sacred councils,—teaching that those saints who reign together with Christ offer to God their prayers for men,—that it is good and profitable suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers, endeavours, and help, to obtain favours from God, through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is our only Redeemer and Saviour; but that those be accounted impious who deny that the saints, enjoying eternal happiness in heaven, are to be invoked, or who assert either that they do not pray for men, or that invoking them to pray for us, though it were only one by one, is idolatry, or that it is repugnant to the word of God, and contrary to the honour of the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, or that it is foolish to pray with the voice of the mind to those reigning in heaven." [21] Such is the present doctrine of the Romish Church on the subject of worship.

The falsehoods asserted in the decree now quoted, and on which both Pius (the reigning Pontiff at the time when it was drawn up) and the divines of the Council of Trent founded this doctrine, are so well known to every Protestant reader of ordinary historical information that it may seem a mere waste of time and words to attempt to refute them. But, as they are confidently maintained by a numerous and increasing body of professing Chris-

[21] Hist. Counc. Trent, translated by Brent, from Pietro Soave Polano, p. 806, and Exam. Concil. Trid., by Chimnicius, ed. 1634, p. 571.

tians, who are making every effort in their power to extend their influence and their faith among the ignorant and the credulous, an exposure of some of the unwarranted allegations in the decree, respecting this doctrine, here seems to be specially called for.

It is alleged that the intercession and invocation of saints were according to the practice of the Apostolic Church, and had been received from the earliest times of the Christian religion; by which must be meant that this kind of worship had existed since the days of Christ and the apostles, and been sanctioned by their authority. But no part of the New Testament will support this assertion. On the contrary, the rule which Christ himself laid down, as of universal application, and subject to no modification whatever, was, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;"[22] he being the only proper object of divine honours.

On this distinct principle, the apostles taught and acted, while engaged in the discharge of the duties of their ministry. Hence Peter would not allow Cornelius to worship them;[23] and Paul, anticipating this corruption of the Romish Church, expressly termed it "a doctrine of devils,"[24] because it was invented, no doubt, by the devil, the father of lies, to deprive God of his due, and because many of those who have been canonized and worshipped as saints lived, while on earth, in a way which the Apostle James declared to be "earthly, sensual, *devilish*."[25] In proof of this, we need only appeal to two instances out of hundreds that might easily be quoted.

---

[22] Matt. iv. 10. [23] Acts x. 26. [24] 1 Tim. iv. 1.
[25] James iii. 15.

"It is to be remarked that many of the Pontifical saints," says a learned author, "were not truly saints, but cruel and bloody men, as Dominic, the author of the Inquisition, of whom it is said, therefore, in the legend concerning him, that his mother, when pregnant with him, dreamed that she brought forth a dog bearing in his mouth a burning torch." [26]

He was evidently "a man of a fiery and impetuous temper," and he has been, with justice, denominated "a violent and sanguinary priest," who gave to the Inquisition its "terrors," and attacked the Albigenses with "fury" and "the force of arms," [27] thereby to convert them to the Romish faith, or exterminate them as a race of irreclaimable heretics. Could such a man be really termed a saint? Are not the apostle's epithets, "*earthly, sensual, devilish*," more applicable to his character? And yet divine honours were decreed him by the Church of Rome, as one of her most eminent saints.

Another of her saints, who had just as little right to the character of saintship, was Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. He was "solemnly enrolled in the highest rank of saints and martyrs in the year 1173." [28] "The Pope and Cardinals were not ignorant that vanity and the love of admiration were his predominant passions;" [29] and the testimony which the historians of his own country have borne respecting him is that "he was vain, obstinate, and implacable; as little affected by the entreaties of his friends as by the threats of his enemies. His ingratitude to his royal benefactor admits of no ex-

[26] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 19, sec. 6.

[27] Mosheim's Church History, vol. iii. p. 196. [28] Ibid. p. 61.

[29] Dr. Henry's Hist. of Great Britain, ed. 3d, vol. v. p. 342.

cuse, and has fixed an indelible stain upon his character." [30] "He now stands confessed as a consummate hypocrite, an implacable bigot, and an ungrateful traitor." [31] "All his zeal was enkindled on the altar of pride, with the unhallowed fire of worldly ambition; the mortifications of body to which he submitted were but the hypocritical artifices of priestcraft, which ill concealed 'the pride and naughtiness of his heart;' and his ostentatious devotions were but employed as panders to his malignant passions." [32] How well does this again agree with the apostle's epithets, "*earthly, sensual, devilish*"! Multitudes of similar applications to the Romish saints could easily be made by every reader of history, of ordinary impartiality and discernment; and, therefore, in all such cases as these, in which the pretended saints evidently appear to have been actuated by an evil instead of a holy spirit, there can be no doubt, even in this point of view alone, though there were not abundance of others, also, that to worship them is a *doctrine of devils.* Even the worship of real saints well deserves this title, from the reason above mentioned, viz., that it is an artifice of the devil, to deprive God of his honours. But the title is much stronger when the spirit worshipped is that of a hypocrite, a hardened sinner, who contrived, while on earth, to impose on the simple, and, by his zeal for the interests of a corrupt church, win his way to canonization after death and the honours of a guilty distinction.

On this ground Paul evidently forbade the worship of such creatures, when he called it a *doctrine of devils;*

---

[30] Dr. Henry's Hist. of Great Britain, ed. 3d, vol. v. p. 392.
[31] Morell's History of England, vol. i. p. 168. [32] Ibid. p. 170.

but not on this ground alone; for the following quotation shows that he also forbade it on the ground of its dishonouring God, or detracting from the honour due to his supremacy, and dividing it between him and his dependent ministering spirits: "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and *worshipping of angels*, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, and *not holding the Head*." [33] Angels may be taken for the departed spirits of good men, as well as for higher orders of celestial beings. But, whether they be so or not, this passage is sufficient to show that none inferior to God himself, here termed the Head, is entitled to religious worship.

When the angel in the Apocalypse, who came to instruct the Apostle John in the meaning of the vision that was displayed to him, saw him overawed by his appearance, and ready to fall down before him and offer him the homage due only to the Almighty, he said to him, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book: worship God." [34] Here the word *angel* evidently means the glorified spirit of a prophet, the highest order of saints; and hence it shows that no departed soul is to be worshipped, however holy his manner of life on earth may have been. The direction given to the apostle to *worship God*, without any allusion being made to any other object of worship, likewise shows that none but God has any right to religious homage, or can be worshipped without guilt and danger.

---

[33] Col. ii. 18. [34] Rev. xxii. 9.

Nothing more, then, is necessary to prove the falsehood of that part of the decree of the Council of Trent which affirms that the worship of saints was "received from the earliest times of the Christian Church." John survived the first hundred years of the Christian era, and, during all that time, the circumstances now stated show that there was no such doctrine or practice allowed in the Church of Christ. This point being once proved destroys the decree, and renders all further argument unnecessary.

But, that it may still more distinctly appear how little credit can be attached to this decree, let it be observed that it follows up the falsehood, which has now been exposed, with another, which ordinary readers have less means of detecting. It is one of the most common of the tricks of Romanists to pretend that they are supported by the testimony of history on all the points in dispute between them and Protestants, thus taking refuge in a region into which comparatively few can follow them to ascertain the truth or falsehood of their positions. Of this we have an instance before us. The decree asserts that the "invocation and intercession of saints" are according to the "consent of the Holy Fathers, and the decrees of sacred councils." But, in so far as this assertion is meant to apply to the first five centuries in the history of the Christian Church, it is as unfounded as that which has just been examined and disproved.

It is true that the worship of saints did begin to creep into the church at a very early period. But that, instead of being *with*, was expressly *against*, the consent and authority of fathers and councils. That we may see how this took place, let us turn our attention, for a little, to

two examples, viz., those of Thecla and the Virgin Mary; for the history of the invocation of these will convey some idea of the way in which the worship of hundreds of other saints, whether real or pretended, was introduced.

While John was confined in Patmos, a certain presbyter of Asia Minor took advantage of his absence to publish a book, which he called the acts of Paul and Thecla. In this book he alleged[35] that Thecla was a young woman of rank in Iconium at the time when Paul came there to preach the gospel; that she was then under engagement to marry one named Tamirus, but that, hearing the apostle preach on celibacy, she broke her engagement; that for many years afterwards she went about with Paul, in attendance on his ministry; and that she was at last consecrated by him to lead a life of celibacy, and received authority to teach and baptize, and to consecrate young women to wear the veil of perpetual virginity.

When John returned from his place of exile, and found this absurd story in circulation, he called the presbyter who had invented it before a public assembly of the church, convicted him of having dispersed copies of a false and supposititious book under the name and title of Paul, made him confess that he had done so, and deposed him from the office of the ministry, that so public an exposure might enable posterity to see and reject the wicked imposition.

Not long after the apostle's death, however, certain interested persons set themselves to revive this romance, with a view to assist them in their endeavours to rest

[35] Chimnicii Exam. Trident. Concil., pp. 495, 496.—Ex Tertulliano de Baptismo, &c.

their doctrines concerning celibacy on something like apostolical authority. For this purpose, the sanctity of Thecla, Paul's alleged attendant, was much dwelt upon, till she came to be worshipped as the foundress and patroness of nunneries and perpetual virginity; and the veneration paid to her, in the worship of the saints, was long only second, perhaps (especially in the third and fourth centuries), to that which was offered to the Virgin Mary.

The worship of Mary made gradual progress, though it does not seem to have excited much public attention, till "towards the conclusion of the fourth century," when the sect of Collyridians sprung up in Arabia, and contended for her right to divine honours, "as a goddess, and judged it necessary to appease her anger, and seek her favour and protection, by libations, sacrifices, and oblations of cakes, and such-like services."[36] Hence, Gibbon said, they "invested her with the name and honours of a goddess."[37] After this period, her worship forced its way, in spite of the opposition of many who bore testimony against it, from time to time, till, about "the year 1050, a daily office was instituted to her, distinguished by seven canonical hours, in a form which anciently was ever used to the honour of the Divine Majesty; and in the next hundred years the worship so increased that it came to the height even to attribute that unto her which the Scriptures speak of the Divine Wisdom."[38] In the prayers offered up to her, she was de-

[36] Mosheim's Church Hist., vol. i. p. 432.

[37] Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. 1826, vol. iii. p. 408.

[38] Brent's Translation of the History of the Council of Trent, by Pietro Soave Polano, p. 181.

nominated "the queen of mercy,"[39] and "the queen of heaven."[40] In the Psaltery compiled for her service by the "devout doctor St. Bonaventura," the name of the Supreme Being is, with very few exceptions, struck out of the Psalms, and hers is substituted in its place. In the 18th of the Psalms thus altered for her worship, she is termed "the mistress [*domina*] of heaven and earth;"[41] in the 57th, "the mistress of the world, and queen of piety;"[42] and in all of them she is addressed in the titles due only to God himself.

"This shameless idolatry," which is not to this day renounced, "in the lamentably corrupt practice of modern Rome, is a precise adaptation to the Virgin Mary of the identical worship formerly offered up to Ashtoreth, or Isis, under the selfsame title of queen of heaven,"[43] as appears from these words which the prophet Jeremiah tells us were used by the idolaters of his day: "We will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our mouth to burn incense to the queen of heaven."[44]

This title is still given, and idolatry offered, to Mary, in the devotions of every true Romanist. For this we have official evidence as lately as 1821, in a recommendation of an *Angelical Exercise*, in a book then published in London, under the name of "Devotion and Office of the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. &c., "including the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The recommendation runs thus: "Whosoever is devoted to this exercise in honour of the blessed

---

[39] Chimnicii Exam. Trid. Conc. p. 580.
[40] Ibid. p. 581. [41] Ibid. p. 596. [42] Ibid. p. 599.
[43] Faber's Difficulties of Romanism, ed. 2d, pp. 478, 479.
[44] Jer. xliv. 17.

Virgin Mary, in reading over every point, may meditate upon it for the space of one *Hail Mary*, or more, and, by God's grace, he will in a short time find himself greatly increased in love towards that blessed *queen of heaven*, and, at the hour of death, will, by so pious a mother, be received as her dear child."[45] In the "litany, or intercession for England, which is to be found in every British Roman Catholic Prayer-Book," she is termed "Mother of God and queen of angels, whose powerful intercession destroys all heresies," and is supplicated, along with many other saints in the Romish calendar, to "pray for England."[46]

The practice of worshipping saints has, in this manner, been allowed to creep into the Romish Church, has received the sanction of its highest authority, and is now its universally besetting sin. "Tutelary saints are invoked *as such*, whether in the lightness of unguarded conversation, or in all the solemnity of a fervent prayer; whether in the gayest or gloomiest mood; and alike by the rustic Catholic at a fair, or a royal devotee at the altar." And while the origin of the custom can be traced far back in the history of Christendom, as ranking with the earliest of the corruptions which tarnished a pure and holy faith, the invocation of saints, as protectors, defenders, and intercessors, is still the prevalent practice in every Catholic church, and daily in every Catholic family, where the injunctions contained in their *authorized prayer-book* are not broken.[47] [48]

---

[45] Blanco White's Evidence against Catholicism, pp. 213, 283.

[46] Kendal's Letters on Ireland, pp. 80, 81.

[47] Keith's Signs of the Times, ed. 2d, vol. i. p. 122.

[48] Roman Catholic Prayer-Book, entitled "The Key of Heaven;

But though it thus appears that saint-worship began at a very early period, and gradually became more prevalent till it was publicly recognized, and is now established by Papal authority as the true worship of the Romish Church, yet it was never acknowledged by any who regulated their opinions purely by the word of God. The most eminent divines of the first five centuries, as the following quotations from their works will prove, were decidedly against it, though Romanists have endeavoured to make some of them speak otherwise.

It has already been proved that no such practice was allowed by Christ and the apostles, the last of whom lived to the end of the first century. The next in authority to the apostles, in the second century, was Polycarp. But that he could not give it the sanction of his approbation is evident from his having been a disciple of the Apostle John, from his having been deemed worthy to succeed that venerable servant of Christ in the charge of the church at Smyrna, and from the prayer which he offered up at the place of his martyrdom, in which there is no mention of saints. His words, when bound to the stake to be burned, were these: "I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the Eternal High-Priest, thy Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to whom, with thyself, and the Holy Ghost, be glory, both now and forever. Amen."[49]

Justin Martyr, who wrote two apologies for the Christians, and presented one of them to the Roman authorities about the year 140 of the Christian era, and the

---

or, A Manual of Devotion," 23d ed., recommended, 21st July, 1824, by D. Murray, R. C. Ap.

[49] Polycarp, in Cave's Lives of the Apostles, 3d ed. p. 122.

other about 162, thus stated the doctrine and practice of the church in his day: "Him (the Father of Righteousness), and the Son who hath proceeded from him, and the Prophetical Spirit, we worship and adore;" [50] but "we adore God alone." [51] That is, Three in One.

Athenagoras, the Athenian philosopher, who had been converted to Christianity, and who flourished about 177, made a similar statement, when he said, "We preach God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are One." [52]

Clement of Alexandria, who flourished about 164, spoke to the same effect, when he prayed, "Son and Father, both one Lord, grant that we may praise the Son and the Father, with the Holy Ghost, all in One." [53]

Tertullian did so, also, in the apology for the Christians, which he presented about 202, and in which are these words: "What we worship is God alone." [54]

Origen, who acted a very conspicuous part, for a long series of years, in the church, and who died, according to some chronologists, in 265, said, "We worship neither angels, nor sun, nor moon, nor stars;" and "we worship and adore no creature, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." [55]

Lactantius, who flourished in the end of the same and the beginning of the following century, maintained that "no religious veneration for *any* but God was to be kept up." [56]

Athanasius, who became a very distinguished man in

---

[50] Justin Martyr, in Dwight's Theology, Sermon 71.
[51] Justin Martyr's 2d Apol. in Chamiero, vol. ii. p. 784.
[52] Ibid. 784. [53] Ibid. 784. [54] Ibid. 784.
[55] Origen ad Rom., lib. i. ibid. 784.
[56] Lactantius, lib. i. cap. 20, ibid. 784.

the church after the death of Lactantius, and who is said to have died about 372, laid it down as a most evident truth that "it is the property of the Godhead alone to be worshipped." [57]

Gregorius Nyssenus, who acquired a name after the decease of Athanasius, and died 392, maintained the same opinion, as these words show: "We have been taught to understand that whatever is created is foreign to the Divine nature, and that the uncreated nature *alone* is to be adored and worshipped, whose character and distinction it is that it has neither beginning nor end of existing." [58]

Ambrosius, who died about 397, speaks to the same effect: "We read that nothing besides God is to be worshipped." Therefore, "if any one think that he should offer devotion to any of the elements, or angels, or powers, let him know that he is in error." [59]

Augustine, who flourished about 398, taught the same doctrine when he said, "Let not our point of religion be the worship of dead men. For though they lived piously, still they are not to be accounted of as requiring from us any such honours. But they rather wish us to worship Him through whose illumination they rejoice that we should be partakers of their merit. They are to be honoured, therefore, on account of imitation, not to be prayed to on account of religion." [60]

Epiphanius, who died 403, gave these directions on

---

[57] Athanasius contra Arianos, in Orat. tertia, in Chamiero, vol. ii. p. 786.

[58] Gregorius Nyssenus, ibid. p. 785.

[59] Ambrosius de Spiritu Sancto, et in prim. ad Coloss., ibid. p. 785.

[60] Augustine, in Faber, p. 476.

this subject: "Let neither Thecla, nor any of the saints, be worshipped. Let Mary be held in honour. But let the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost be worshipped. This mystery belongs to God. Nor do angels take such glorification." [61]

Chrysostom, who died 417, also considered it as an indisputable truth that "to worship is the property of the creature; but to be worshipped, that of the Lord of creatures." [62]

Hieronymus, who died 420, said, "We worship and adore neither relics of martyrs, nor even the sun and moon, nor angels, nor archangels, nor cherubim, nor seraphim, nor any name that is named in the present world or the world to come, lest we serve and worship the creature more than the Creator." [63]

Theodoretus, who died 457, said, "We give honour to those of eminent virtue, as very good men; but of all we give divine worship to God alone, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." [64]

Such are the testimonies of the most distinguished Fathers of the first five centuries of the Christian era. In these, however, instead of consent, there is the strongest evidence of the most decided opposition, to the worship of saints, and of every being but God himself.

These men evidently spoke the sentiments of the church in their lifetime on this point; and therefore it is not to be supposed that any sacred council, in those

---

61 Epiphanius contra Collyridianos, in Chamiero, vol. ii. p. 786; also Medulla Theologiæ Patrum, p. 712, and Faber, p. 478.

62 Chrysostom, in Chamiero, p. 785.

63 Hieronymus Epis. ad Riparium, ibid. p. 785.

64 Theodoretus, Ther. II. in Chamiero, p. 785.

days, could have held an opposite opinion on a subject so clearly false as that of saint-worship. It was, besides, long before this corruption became so public and extensive as to require any notice to be taken of it by any general council. But when it did become too notorious to be overlooked or despised, we find that several early councils did pass decrees against it. For instance, the *Council of Laodicea* condemned it in the time of Athanasius.[65] So did one of the *Councils of Carthage* in the time of Augustine.[66] Many later councils and fathers, it is allowed, approved of it. But, with the disapprobation of the first five hundred years opposed to them, their decisions and opinions must go for nothing.

After the period to which these testimonies are brought down, this species of idolatry made great progress in the Romish church. But it was never universally admitted even by the members of that communion themselves. The very article in the decrees of the Council of Trent, on which we have been commenting, and by which saint-worship has become a part of the public and perpetual laws of Romanism, was not passed (even at that late date, when it might have been thought a very easy matter) without much difficulty and difference of opinion among the Tridentine fathers,—the very persons, one would suppose, most interested in maintaining, and most likely to maintain, unanimity respecting it.

In all the ages of the Christian church, after this corruption began to be practised, even in the darkest and most despotic times of Papal oppression, there were

[65] Chimnicii Ex. Conc. Trid., p. 638; and Milner's Ch. Hist., vol. ii. p. 158.

[66] Chimnicii Ex. Conc. Trid., p. 644.

many good men who lifted up their voice and boldly testified against it.

Since the reformation of religion in the sixteenth century, the public Confessions of Faith in every Protestant church have borne evidence against this abomination. Of this, the few following quotations may be taken as a proof.

The Bohemian Confession of 1536 teaches "that the honour and worship due to God must not be transferred to saints." [67]

The Augsburg Confession of 1540 "condemns the whole practice of invoking holy men who have departed from this life." [68]

The Wirtemberg Confession of 1552 asserts that "it is manifest that not saints, but God alone, must be invoked." [69]

The Helvetian Confession of 1566 has these words: "We teach that God alone is to be adored and worshipped. Therefore the saints in heaven we neither adore, nor worship, nor invoke." [70]

The Scotch Confession of 1674 maintains that "religious worship is not to be given to angels, saints, or any other creature." [71]

The English Confession of 1571 says, "The Romish doctrine concerning invocation of saints is vainly in-

---

[67] Bohemica Confessio, art. xvii. Corpus et Syntagma, Confessionum Fidei.

[68] Augustina Con., art. xxi. in Corp. et Syntag. Confes.

[69] Wirtembergica Con., p. 168, ibid.

[70] Helvetica Con., p. 21, ibid.

[71] Scotch Con., chap. 21, sect. 2.

vented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God."[72]

In short, "to receive worship is the prerogative and incommunicable glory of the uncreated God" alone.[73]

What, then, can be said of a church that rests its tenets on so daring falsehoods? All its distinguishing peculiarities are not one whit sounder, when tried by Scripture and the history of the early ages of Christianity, than the worship of saints is. This prominent article of its faith, we have seen, cannot be established on any of the grounds on which it pretends to have been founded. Neither Christ nor his apostles, neither fathers nor general councils, for the first five hundred years, allowed it. Nor did true believers, even in the darkest and most oppressive times of popish despotism, ever acknowledge it, any more than reformed churches and Protestant divines have done in latter times. The same thing may safely be said of all the other impious peculiarities of Romish worship. *Ex uno disce omnes:* from one specimen you may form an opinion of the whole. It has been considered by many as only a disguised kind of heathenism. Gibbon called it, as it existed even in the seventh century, when many of its more recent corruptions were not introduced, "a semblance of paganism;"[74] and certainly between paganism and Romanism there are many common points, as the following extract will show. "Dr. Middleton, in his letter from Rome, observes, Since we see the present people at Rome worshipping in

---

[72] Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, art. xxii.

[73] Sievewright's sermon, 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[74] Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. 1826, vol. iii. p. 408.

the same temples, at the same altars, sometimes the same images, and always with the same ceremonies, as the old Romans, they must have more charity, as well as skill in distinguishing, than I pretend to have, who can absolve them from the same superstition and idolatry of which we condemn their pagan ancestors. Popery and paganism are in many respects one and the same system, under different names. The old heathens worshipped images; the papists do the same: they adored souls of dead men when deified; the papists, copying them, worship reputed saints, and some of infamous character, as the rebel Thomas a Becket, and Garnet the Jesuit, who was privy to the Gunpowder Plot: the ancient heathen temples were dedicated to their various gods; so are the popish churches to their patron saints: different countries were, by the pagans, allotted to the protection of different gods; and by papists, to that of their different saints: the *aquæ lustrales*, or lustral waters of the heathen idolater, answer to the holy water of the papist; the household gods of the former, to the patron saints of the latter; the canonization of popish saints, to the deification of heathen gods; the Pope, to the Supreme Pontiff, and the monks and nuns of popery, to the augurs and vestal virgins of heathenism; the popish altars, to the pagan ones; the incense of the pagan temples, to that of the popish churches; the perpetual fires before heathen idols, to the lamps and candles which are perpetually burning before the images and shrines of popish saints. The votive offerings to heathen idols resemble those now made to the saints of the popish calendar; and as those of the pagans were hung up in the temple of the god to whom an offering had been vowed, so those of the

papists, in a similar manner, are hung up in the church of their idol saints. The processions in honour of popish saints are borrowed from those in honour of heathen gods; and as the heathens carried in pomp the images of their idols, so do the papists the images of theirs. The Carnival answers to the Bacchanalia; and in many other respects their systems harmonize. That which is still more surprising is that at Rome, and other places, the very idols and temples of the heathen, by only changing the name, have been used in the antichristian church. At Rome, the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus became a Saint Peter, by changing only the thunderbolt into two keys. At Bordeaux, an old statue of Jupiter on an eagle became a Christ ascending into heaven. An antique statue of a young Bacchus was shown to Dr. Middleton, which was then worshipped as the image of a female saint. The old heathen temple named the Pantheon was dedicated to Jove and all the gods, and by a Pope was reconsecrated to the Virgin Mary and all the saints. In England, popery is not to be seen in its proper array; a principal business of popish priests in England is to hide the enormities of their antichristian system."[75]

This resemblance between paganism and Romanism was admitted by Gibbon, as we have already seen; and he endeavoured to account for it in the following way: "The same uniform original spirit of superstition might suggest, in the most distant ages and countries, the same methods of deceiving the credulity and affecting the senses of mankind; but it must be ingenuously confessed

---

[75] Pike's True Happiness, p. 34.—Note at end.

that the ministers of the Catholic church imitated the profane model which they were impotent to destroy. The most respectable bishops had persuaded themselves that the ignorant rustics would more cheerfully renounce the superstitions of paganism if they found some resemblance, some compensation, in the bosom of Christianity. The religion of Constantine achieved, in less than a century, the final conquest of the Roman empire; but the victors themselves were insensibly subdued by the arts of their vanquished rivals."[76] And what was thus begun in superstition, in cunning, and in simplicity has ever since been carried on in the same, or a worse, spirit. What the same writer has said in another place, in regard to the worship of saints and relics, equally refers to the other peculiarities of Romanism down to the present day: "In the long period of twelve hundred years which elapsed between the reign of Constantine and the reformation of Luther, the worship of saints and relics corrupted the pure and perfect simplicity of the Christian model."[77]

What is thus corrupt, unchristian, and heathen in form, faith, and spirit, cannot be the true worship of the God of the Bible, as he therein has revealed himself. The false fancies thus formed of him do not set him before the mind as his own truths do, but lead those who believe in them so to modify his attributes and character that they worship they "know not what."

The same remarks apply, more or less, to the unscriptural opinions and worship of God held and practised

---

[76] Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. ii. p. 216.
[77] Ibid. p. 213.

by Arians, Socinians, neologists, and other heretics that take up wrong views of God.

The general conclusion to which all this leads is that we should pay divine honours to none but God; and that we should worship the Father, Jesus Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit, as God, but all Three only as One God.

CHAPTER II.

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

THE reasons for prayer are innumerable, as our wants, our wishes, and our blessings,—all which furnish the subjects of prayer. Every thing, in God's word and works, which points to our dependent state, tells us that we ought to pray. In what is to follow, therefore, nothing more can be attempted than to state and illustrate, with as much brevity as possible, a very few of the most obvious considerations which should move every professing Christian to the faithful performance of this most important duty.

SECTION 1.—*We should pray, because God has commanded us to do so.*

This is evident both from the language and institutions of Scripture.

1. The language of Scripture is very explicit on this point. "There are many precepts which make it our indispensable duty to pray."[1] Thus: "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble."[2] "Ye shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me; ye

[1] Hele's Offices of Private Devotion, ed. 2d, pref. p. 22.

[2] Ps. l. 14.

shall seek me, and shall search for me, with all your heart."[3] "Ye people, pour out your heart before God."[4] "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."[5] "Worship God."[6] "Watch and pray."[7] "Pray without ceasing."[8] "Men ought always to pray."[9] "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."[10] "In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."[11]

In these passages we have the simple command, stripped of every thing but the divine authority which has sent it forth, though expressed in a variety of forms; and this alone should be sufficient to make us pray. "The command of the great God of heaven and earth is as weighty to bind the conscience in this case as in any other branch of duty where he has been pleased to interpose his authority."[12] "No man is left at liberty whether he will pray or no."[13] "God commands us to pray to him; not leaving it to our own discretion whether we shall pray or not, but positively and expressly enjoining the duty as requisite, equally as an act of homage due to himself, and as the means of securing our own welfare."[14] "Among all the duties prescribed to us by our religion, the rendering due worship to God is the principal; and God accordingly requires, and positively enjoins, its per-

---

[3] Jer. xxix. 12, 13. [4] Ps. lxii. 8. [5] Isa. lv. 6.
[6] Rev. xxii. 9. [7] Matt. xxvi. 41. [8] 1 Thess. v. 17.
[9] Luke xviii. 1. [10] Eph. vi. 18. [11] Phil. iv. 6.
[12] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 183.
[13] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 267.
[14] Dr. Thomson's Posthumous Sermons. Matt. vii. 7.

formance, as he who heareth prayer, and to whom all flesh shall come."[15]

But, though "the absolute necessity of prayer is put out of all doubt by the plain command of God,"[16] yet, in addition to this motive of authority, we have many considerations submitted to us to make us willing to obey. "No duty has more encouraging promises annexed to it."[17] Hence "we ought to be induced to pray, both by the command to pray, and by the promise of being heard,"[18] which it has pleased God, in many instances, to attach to the command, as the following quotations will show.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."[19] "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."[20] "If thou shalt seek the Lord, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul."[21] "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."[22] "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth; he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them."[23] "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."[24]

Another inducement to obey the command to pray is the denunciation of the divine displeasure against the prayerless, with which it is often coupled. They are

---

[15] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.
[16] Venn's Duty, 267.
[17] Hele's Offices, pref. p. 12.
[18] Piscajor on Luke xi. 9.
[19] Jer. xxxiii. 3.
[20] Matt. vii. 7.
[21] Deut. iv. 29.
[22] Ps. lv. 22.
[23] Ps. cxlv. 18, 19.
[24] Ps. xxxiv. 10.

threatened with all the evils arising from God's wrath. Thus: "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."[25] "I will stretch out mine hand upon those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him."[26] "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."[27]

2. The institutions of Scripture have also the force of a command. As "the whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer,"[28] so is the whole word of God equal to an express command to pray. All revelation was given for the purpose of making God's will known, and, consequently, of bringing mankind near to him, which could never be effected without prayer. The whole design and tendency of both the Old Testament and the New are to promote devotional ends. The very spirit of every part of them is that of piety. This is the character not only of the professed devotional parts of them, but also of all the accounts which they contain of the lives of distinguished servants of God. Of this we have a particular instance in the life of our blessed Redeemer, whose example bears along with it all the authority of a command. "We should do well to observe that our Saviour performed external as well as inward worship and devotion to God;"[29] for "here is a copy

[25] 1 Sam. ii. 30. [26] Zeph. i. 4, 6. [27] Prov. i. 24–28.
[28] Shorter Catechism, Question 99.
[29] Matt. xxvi. 39; Luke vi. 12; John xvii. 1.

which our Master hath set us to write after, a lesson that all must learn and practise, that would be his disciples;"[30] and what is this but our Master's command?

Such being the general design of the Scriptures, the particular institutions appointed in them must, of course, have a similar end to serve. Of this the following instances are in evidence.

Certain *times* are there appointed for religious purposes. "Under the religion of Moses, and indeed, as there seems reason to believe, from the period of the creation of man, the seventh day of the week was set apart for the service of the true God; the most explicit injunction as to the mode of observing it was inserted among the ten commandments given from Mount Sinai; and the violation of this injunction, or the profanation of the Sabbath, as the seventh day was denominated, was branded by the prophets as a crime of deep malignity, uniformly bringing down upon those who were guilty of it the divine indignation."[31]

Agreeably to this account, we find, from Scripture, that immediately after the creation of the world "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it;"[32] and afterwards he made the sanctification of that day a part of his covenant with the Israelites at Sinai, as the fourth commandment testifies. "Remember the seventh day to keep it holy,"[33] &c. To impress the sanctity of this institution still more deeply upon their minds, the command was repeated, in another form, at another time: "Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep, for it is a sign

[30] Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts, p. 292, ed. 1817.
[31] Dr. G. Cook's View of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 285.
[32] Gen. ii. 3. [33] Ex. xx. 8.

between me and you, throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you."[34] Many later intimations were given concerning it, to which it is needless to allude more particularly.

Many other seasons were also appointed under the Jewish dispensation for religious purposes. These "were monthly, as the new moons;[35] or annual, as the passover,[36] the pentecost," or feast of weeks,[37] "the feast of ingathering, or of tabernacles,[38] and the feast of trumpets;[39] to which we may add the annual fast, or day of expiation.[40] Besides these, there were others that returned once in a certain number of years; as the sabbatical year,[41] and[42] the jubilee."[43] In short, "the Hebrews had morning and evening sacrifices, and many days for feasting and fasting, as the Sabbath, the paschal days, the new moons, and the feast of tabernacles, and others well known to everybody."[44]

Under the Christian economy, the first instead of the seventh day of the week has been appointed to be kept holy. On it we are commanded "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together,"[45] to worship God and edify one another; and "we cannot set it aside without disputing the authority of that sacred volume in which the institution is recognized."[46] This is the only periodical season positively set aside in the New Testament

---

[34] Ex. xxxi. 13. [35] Num. xxviii. 14. [36] Ex. xii. 17.
[37] Ex. xxxiv. 23. [38] Ex. xxiii. 16. [39] Lev. xxiii. 20.
[40] Lev. xxiii. 27. [41] Lev. xxv. 2. [42] Lev. xxv. 10.
[43] Jennings's Jewish Antiquities, ed. 1825, p. 448.
[44] Selden de Jure Nat. et Gent., lib. iii. cap. 3.
[45] Heb. x. 25.
[46] Cook's View of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 321.

for religious ends, though general directions are given for seizing every opportunity that occurs to offer up our devotions to God.

Certain *places* were also appointed, under the Mosaic dispensation, for religious purposes, such as the tabernacle of the congregation,[47] and the temple of Jerusalem.[48] "The tabernacle which Moses built in the wilderness, by the special appointment of the God of Israel, was the first religious structure in which the Eternal Majesty vouchsafed to dwell on earth. The second and last material habitation of Jehovah was the Temple, the plan of which was designed[49] by God."[50] This building was emphatically called "the house of prayer."[51]

Under the gospel no particular place is appointed for divine worship, because the Christian dispensation was intended to apply to every kingdom and country, and to "rule over all." But we are required to "assemble ourselves together"[52] in some place or other; and wherever "two or three are gathered together in God's name, there is he present to bless them."[53] This gives the sanction of the Almighty to every place where true worshippers meet together to do him homage, whether in public or private.

Certain *rites* were likewise appointed for the same end. Of these the most ancient were various kinds of sacrifices and offerings. "It is most probable sacrifices were first instituted by God himself, and enjoined on our first parents presently after the fall;"[54] from whom, and after-

[47] Ex. xxv. 26, &c. [48] 1 Kings vi. &c. [49] 1 Chron. xxviii. 12, 19.
[50] McEwen on the Types, book iii. sec. 2.
[51] Isa. lvi. 7; Matt. xxi. 13. [52] Heb. x. 25.
[53] Matt. xviii. 20. [54] Jennings's Jewish Antiq., pp. 214, 215.

wards from Noah, all nations received them by tradition.[55] However, in process of time, these, as well as all other branches of religious faith and worship, were miserably corrupted. When, therefore, God chose Israel to be his people and church, among whom he would revive the true religion, he gave them anew the law concerning sacrifices. The general "design and use of" these and the other "offerings" of various descriptions, also enjoined them, "was partly an acknowledgment of their receiving all their good things from the hand of God, and of his right in the whole of that of which they offered him a part; though, to make this act the more significant and expressive, it was a part of almost every thing they had." "That God prescribed sacrifices to his peculiar people is not disputed; for a great part of the second volume is occupied in describing the various laws by which this species of worship should be adjusted."[56] "The Hebrews had" also "drink-offerings and peace-offerings, and expiatory offerings, of various kinds, and for various peculiar ends, prescribed to them."[57] In all these, however, "prayer and praise were implied. Whatever material thing was ever offered to God, the intention of the person who offered it was to express his desire that God would either grant him some particular favour, or, in general, that God would grant him whatever he stood in need of; or else it was to declare his thanks and testify his gratitude for some mercy which he had received. This was the judgment of Philo, the very ancient Jew, who says

[55] Kennicott on the Tree of Life and the Oblations of Cain and Abel, p. 201; and Witsii Miscel., tom. i. lib. 2, dis. 2, sec. 1, 15.

[56] McEwen on the Types, b. ii. sec. 3.

[57] Selden de Jure Nat. et Gent., lib. iii. c. 3.

'that all who offer sacrifice do it by way of prayer, or thanksgiving;' and, speaking of the very ancient people, he says, 'they betook themselves to thanksgiving and prayer, by sacrifice.'"[58]

But the most distinguishing rites of the Jews were circumcision[59] and the passover.[60] These survived the destruction of their city and temple and national existence, and have been preserved and carried about with them, amidst all kinds of difficulties, in every country whither they have wandered, and in every age, down to the present day.

In the New Testament, two rites corresponding with these have been instituted. They are baptism[61] and the Lord's supper,[62] and the only peculiar rites by which Christianity is distinguished. The commission which Christ gave to his disciples requires of them that they should not only teach the gospel, but baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and his promise was that he should be with them in this, as well as in the other parts of their ministry, to the end of the world.[63] Among the early Christians this rite "was conceived to hold the same place in the Christian church that circumcision did in the Jewish, the latter being the type of the former."[64] And as to the Lord's supper, "Of the express institution of this rite, under circumstances most deeply affecting, and of its admirable tendency, there has been throughout the Christian world almost but one opinion."[65] "It is apparent that the

---

[58] Johnson's Unbloody Sacrifice, 1718, vol. ii. p. 123.
[59] Gen. xvii. 10, 11. [60] Ex. xii. 3–28.
[61] Matt. xxviii. 19. [62] Matt. xxvi. 26, 30.
[63] Cook's View, vol. ii. p. 226. [64] Ibid. p. 334. [65] Ibid. p. 403.

Lord's supper was not meant solely for those who attended Jesus during his ministry upon earth, but that it is to continue in the church till the end of the world, that all who love Christ may have an opportunity of strengthening their feelings of devotion and gratitude by solemnly remembering the great events connected with his manifestation."[66]

Certain *persons* were, still farther, set aside from the rest of mankind for religious purposes. The patriarchs were chosen to preserve the true worship of God amidst the increasing darkness and delusions of idolatry. Their descendants, also, in the Jewish line, and, after them, all Christians, were selected for the same end.

Of the Jews as a body, Moses said, by divine authority, "The Lord hath avouched thee to be his peculiar people, that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God."[67] Of these, again, the tribe of Levi was chosen, "to do the service of the tabernacle."[68] And, still farther, from among the families of this tribe "Aaron and his sons" were appointed to "wait on their priests' office"[69] in all matters of religion.

"Wherever there hath been any religion, there have been priests, whose office it peculiarly was to minister unto God in the service belonging to him. But this is the first time we read of any constituted in Israel by a divine appointment; at least the priesthood was not confined to the particular family of Aaron, who was made high-priest, and his sons priests of a lower order."[70]

---

[66] Cook's View, vol. ii. p. 405.

[67] Deut. xxvi. 18, 19. [68] Numb. iii. 6–8.

[69] Numb. iii. 10; Ex. xxviii. 1.

[70] Bishop Patrick on Ex. xxviii. 1.

In addition to these ministers in holy things, God raised up a long succession of prophets among the Jews, to reclaim them from the idolatrous practices into which they afterwards fell, and to keep pure and undefiled religion alive among them, to be a light to all around them.

Farther, when the Jewish dispensation had served its appointed time, a new order of things sprung up, to be administered by a new order of persons. At the head of this system Christ appears unveiled and freed from all the mystery of types and shadows under which he was worshipped in the Levitical services. After him the apostles occupy the most distinguished place amidst the arrangements of the gospel. Their divine Master "constituted them the first of a series of instructors and ministers, who were to be continued and to be blessed as long as the earth endures."[71]

To the public office-bearers in the Christian church, again, succeed all true believers, in every station and relation in life, who walk not in the ways of the world, but in the statutes and testimonies of the Lord. All were set aside, in the councils of infinite wisdom, to promote the ends of godliness among men. Hence, in reference to the various places occupied by public and private Christians in the church, the passage is applicable where it is said that God "gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."[72]

Thus, a "visible church was instituted, to be like a

---

[71] Cook's View, vol. ii. pp. 326, 327.

[72] Eph. iv. 11, 12.

city upon a hill, a standing memorial to the world of the duty which we owe our Maker, to call men continually, both by example and instruction, to attend to it, and, by the form of religion ever before their eyes, remind them of the reality."[73]

From all this it clearly appears that to pray is a duty commanded by God, directly in the words, and indirectly in the institutions, of Scripture. There can be no excuse, therefore, for the neglect of it. There is no appeal from God's command, and no safety under its violation. The highest of all authority, and our own welfare, thus render it indispensably necessary for every one of us, in every station and profession of life, to attend most faithfully and unweariedly to the public and private offices of religion, to the worship of the living God; for "in the great and universal concern of religion both sexes and all ranks are equally interested."[74]

Section 2.—*We should pray, because nature prompts us to it.*

"Devotion is natural to the soul, and was implanted in it by the hand that gave it existence;"[1] and prayer "is a principal branch of devotion, or religious worship, which we are moved to by the very sight of nature."[2] "To pray to God is a natural dictate of the human mind."[3] It is "the natural expression of the sentiments of a dependent creature."[4]

---

[73] Butler's Analogy, part 2, ch. 1.

[74] Hannah More's Essays, 1821, p. 57.

[1] Wilkes's Advice, ed. 8th, p. 69. [2] Henry on Prayer, pref. p. 1.

[3] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 139.

[4] Principal Hill's Lect., b. v. c. 5, sec. 3.

1. This is evident from its being agreeable to reason, which is the most distinguishing part of our nature. "'Tis the first-born of rationality;"[5] nay, "religion is exalted reason, refined and sifted from the grosser parts of it."[6]

To be satisfied of this, we have only to think for a little on the self-evident truth that God, the best judge of reason, "would not require it, if it were not consistent with his infinite wisdom, and, consequently, agreeable to the most enlightened reason."[7] "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?"[8] "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[9] And he it is who has laid it down as an indisputable point "that men ought always to pray,"[10] and declared, by the mouth of his inspired servant, that to do so is a "reasonable service."[11]

If he, then, who is the never-failing fountain whence all the streams of human reason flow, has stamped the character of rationality upon it, who, that has not lost his senses, can doubt for one instant of its reasonableness, and its consequent intimacy with the best principles of our nature?

"But even among men, the greatest masters of reason have practised, and held the duties of devotion to be conformable to the soundest reason, and, under this impression, have exerted themselves to promote a spirit

---

[5] Young's Night Thoughts, Compl. Night 8.

[6] Savile, Marquis of Halifax; Advice to his Daughter: in Brewster's Testimonies, p. 68.

[7] Mrs. Huntington's Memoirs.

[8] Ps. xciv. 10.

[9] Col. ii. 3.

[10] Luke xviii. 1.

[11] Rom. xii. 1.

of piety in others."[12] In [13]evidence of this, we need only "bring to our remembrance such distinguished characters as Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Selden, Grotius, Addison Boerhaave, Euler,"[14] Locke, Barrow, Taylor, Wilkins, Cudworth, Butler, and many others, admitted even by the enemies of religion to have been men of the most profound learning and clearest judgment, and therefore well qualified to decide what was reasonable or not. All these counted the worship of God a reasonable service; and surely their opinion should satisfy us that in attending to that service we call into operation all that part of our nature which raises us above the irrational creation around us.

The same conclusion is suggested by the consideration that prayer is an act of submission to the highest authority and best of all beings, similar to the homage which is paid to lawful authorities on earth, and which is held to be reasonable by all men of sober and well-informed minds. On this principle rests the complaint against the ungodly, contained in these words: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If, then, I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts."[15] When the question is viewed in this light, we must see that prayer "is but a reasonable acknowledgment of supreme perfection and our absolute dependence on God for the blessings that we want."[16] "The inward sense of the heart must show at once the pre-eminence and

---

[12] Mrs. Huntington's Memoirs.

[13] See chap. vi. 5.

[14] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. ii. p. 200.

[15] Mal. i. 6.

[16] Chandler on Eph. iii. *ad fin.*

infinite grandeur of the original cause of all ought to be entertained with the highest admiration and praise and submissive veneration of soul."[17] "What can be so truly becoming a dependent state as to pay our adoring homage to the Author of all perfection, and profess our devoted allegiance to the Supreme Almighty Governor of the universe?"[18] "Is it not most reasonable to acknowledge, by this spiritual sacrifice of prayer, God's infinite power and goodness, and that most providential care by which he governs all human affairs? And when our very being and life depend upon him, and all the comfort and happiness of life, how congruous is it to exhibit this sign and token of his holding us by the hand, and of our being borne up by him!"[19] "What can be more becoming than to join with others in adoring the perfections of the Father of our spirits, and in ascribing that glory which is due to his name?"[20] "For the creature to adore the Creator, for the offender to desire forgiveness, for the indigent to ask relief, for the relieved to be thankful, is, surely, a very reasonable service."[21] Similar things are thought reasonable in the ordinary occurrences of this life; and why should we vary the rule when judging of what is due to God? If the rational part of our nature approve of the practice of honouring superior power and excellence in man, the principle becomes infinitely stronger when applied to

---

17 Hutcheson's Introd. to Moral Philosophy, b. i. c. 4.

18 Hervey, in Buck's Anecdotes, vol. i. p. 158.

19 Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.

20 Walker's Sermons, Exod. xx. 8.

21 Dr. Richard Newton's Sermons, Ps. xxvi. 8.

God, the head of all authority and the fountain of all goodness.

Farther, in all dealings between man and man, "his mind is" considered as "cross to nature, who requites not affection with gratitude. All favours have this success, if they light on good ground they bring forth thanks."[22] "If a man is grateful to his benefactor, he will tell him so; if no acknowledgments are made, and no outward signs of gratitude manifest themselves, he will be chargeable with ingratitude."[23] Now, all this applies to prayer, a great part of which is nothing else than an expression of the gratitude of the heart to God for his manifold blessings. Our reason calls for thanksgivings to him who has done so many wonderful things for our welfare. "In the existence God has given us, and in the benefits which attach us strongly to it, this shows him to be the first and greatest object of our gratitude."[24] "Gratitude should be the governing frame and reigning disposition of a Christian's heart, who is under the strongest obligations to divine goodness that a reasonable person can possibly be. It is a reasonable service which we owe to God."[25] "As to the Creator and upholder of all things we owe all we have and all we are, so he has a right to our best services."[26] Every man's reason says so. Nothing can be more agreeable to reason than that those who were the Lord's by the right of creation, and again made his by the sur-

---

[22] Feltham's Resolves, No. 77, in Br. Test. 280.

[23] Beattie's Elements of Moral Science, No. 2; 81, in ib. 322.

[24] Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 94, in ibid. 307.

[25] Chandler on Eph. v. 19.

[26] Mrs. Taylor's Hints, ed. 9th, p. 146.

prising grace of redemption, should live wholly to please and serve him. Every argument of reason says, "Glorify God."[27]

In short, "to all who are convinced of the existence of God, who venerate the Deity as the fountain of excellence, and ascribe to the beneficence of his providence the numberless mercies which sweeten life, and the gracious arrangements by which happiness is dispensed to various orders of beings, it must be apparent that it constitutes a part of the duty of intelligent creatures to adore the perfections of God, to obey his will, and to express gratitude for the riches of his bounty."[28]

Thus it appears, from the character of devotion given by God himself, from the opinion and practice of the greatest uninspired masters of reason, from the universal practice of rendering honour to superiors in authority and excellence, and from the right which every benefactor has to the gratitude of the party whom he has benefited by his good offices, that to pray to our heavenly Father is a most reasonable service, and therefore most natural. Reason, which has been termed the light of nature, leads every one, in his calm reflecting moments, to see that it is his indispensable duty to pray, and prompts him to it. O Lord, let not, then, the delusions of a world that puts darkness for light mislead my soul, and tempt me to think lightly of thy worship. Sanctify all the powers of my mind, and enable me to devote them continually to thee, for Christ's sake. Amen.

2. That nature prompts to this duty, is also evident

---

[27] Sievewright's Serm., 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[28] Cook's View of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 284.

from the strong impulse to devotion which we feel in our minds when we are placed in situations of more than usual solemnity, difficulty, or danger.

Though our reason tells us that it is our bounden duty to pray, and we feel it to be so, yet the impression is such that in general, without the help of some external exciting circumstances, it proves too feeble to rouse us from our indolence, carelessness, and worldly-heartedness, to put forth our energies in the acts of divine worship. The depraved affections of our hearts also interfere with and keep down our sentiments of piety, unless some strong counteracting cause be called into action to keep them in check and bring better affections into operation. Hence, in the ordinary state of human feeling, there is not only a spiritual languor and neglect of the duties of piety in all men, but even "a strong indisposition to pray."[29] Nay, to pray acceptably, "we are by nature both reluctant, and utterly helpless, and insufficient in ourselves;" for "we can do nothing by our own strength."[30] The only "acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men."[31]

Still, after all these circumstances are conceded, it must be admitted, even by the most unwilling, that "nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship. Afflictions, and pressure of outward evils, will make him pray, and pray much."[32] Nay, the

---

[29] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 139.

[30] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 53.

[31] Confession of Faith, chap. xxi. 1.

[32] Mead's Christian, ed. 1825, pp. 111, 113.

"first feeling of the mind, and the natural expression of that feeling, in any sudden and alarming emergency and distress, is an act of prayer to God."[33] "On all great and trying occasions, men are prompted, by an irresistible impulse, to lift up their eyes and address their voice to heaven."[34]

"It is natural for such a creature as man to pray when he is in want, fear, or distress; nay, I think it is impossible not to pray at such times."[35] When thus situated, "the power of conscience, that monitor within, raises its voice in the breast of every man, a witness for his Creator."[36] His "instinctive sense of religion"[37] is awakened, and makes him seek for relief where alone he believes it is to be found.

The same remarks apply to the distresses of the soul; for "the moment that the sinner feels the real burden of his transgressions, and is made fully sensible of his need of divine mercy, that moment he as naturally and as necessarily cries to God for the requisite communications as the hungry child craves bread from its bountiful parent,[38] or as the condemned criminal supplicates pardon from his compassionate sovereign."[39]

All this we know to be true from our own personal experience. When the world smiles upon us, while health and strength and outward prosperity remain with us, we are too apt to forget God. But when the scene is reversed, when we are deprived of our friends, when

---

[33] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 7. [34] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.
[35] Mr. Andrew Baxter's Inquiry into the Soul, ed. 2d, vol. ii. p. 203.
[36] Abercrombie's Intellectual Powers, p. 36.
[37] V. Knox's Essays, No. 90. [38] Acts ix. 11.
[39] Dr. Thomson's Posthumous Serm., Jer. xvii. 14.

our worldly plans fail, when disease takes hold on us, when danger threatens us or those most dear to us, and when we have tried every human means of relief and found all unavailing, then the soul feels its desolate state, and cries to God for help. What is all this but nature within pleading for God, and urging us to flee to Him who alone can deliver us in the time of need? O God, what time I am overwhelmed and in distress I will cry unto thee, and do thou hear me and make my soul cleave unto thee, the Rock of my refuge, as to my chief and only good, in Christ Jesus my Saviour. Amen.

3. That nature prompts to this duty, is further evident from the fact that among every people, in every age and country, whether barbarous or civilized, some kind of religion has been observed.

"There is still in the soul of man, corrupted as it certainly is, something which leads to the practice of worship. Hence it is that certain places have been set apart as sacred, that temples and altars have been built, and that officers of different descriptions have been appointed to preside at and direct their rites and services."[40] "Over all the world, even among the most savage tribes, temples have been built, worshippers have assembled in crowds, and the wildest superstition has, by the various forms of homage which it adopted, borne testimony to this truth, that there is *some* God, to whom, as the hearer of prayer, all flesh shall come."[41] "Among all mankind, there is no nation so savage and barbarous which, although ignorant of what God it ought to have,

[40] Foote's Serm. No. 13. [41] Dr. Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.

does not well know that it ought to have one."[42] Hence, "no less universal than the belief of a God is the prevalence of some form, which almost every nation has adopted, in order to avert his wrath or implore his protection. The American savage, the African who pants beneath the fervours of a vertical sun, the Asiatic who riots amidst the luxuriance of spontaneous nature, the frozen native of the Polar regions, whose intellectual eye is shaded with moral darkness, the rude barbarian of the north, in common with the civilized inhabitants of Europe, address this great Being in some recognized form of adoration."[43] "Nothing can be a more satisfactory evidence that devotion is a part of our nature; for we have no higher proof that any thing is natural, than the fact that it exists in all men of all ages and nations,"[44] as the feeling of piety has done.

Its universality, however, has been denied by some, though without sufficient authority, as the following detail will show. Thus, it has been said that "several tribes have been discovered in America which have no idea whatever of a Supreme Being, and no rites of religious worship."[45] But, at the same time, it has been admitted that "it is only among men in the most uncultivated state of nature, and while their intellectual faculties are so feeble and limited as hardly to elevate them above the irrational creation, that we discover this total insensibility to the impressions of an invisible power;"[46]

---

[42] Cicero de Natura Deorum, lib. i. cap. 8.

[43] Christian Observer for 1818, p. 431.

[44] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 139.

[45] Robertson's History of America, ed. 1811, vol. i. p. 356.

[46] Ibid. p. 357.

and so extreme a case cannot be taken as a fair test of what nature suggests, but the reverse, as to the worship of God.

Something similar to this was lately stated by the commander of an expedition of discovery fitted out by a continental state. He found a tribe on the northwest coast of America that, according to his belief, "have a confused notion of immortality; and this is the only trace of religion which appears among them. They have neither priests, idols, nor any description of worship."[47] But this statement involves in its very terms a principle of religion, however feeble and overborne by superstition and other degrading circumstances; and a more intimate acquaintance with the habits of that tribe would, no doubt, have brought to light more manifestations of this principle than the short visit of the navigator enabled him to discover among them.

A better authority, because a learned American divine, and more accustomed to religious investigations, has informed us that, generally, "the American pagans offer sacrifices and oblations, both to the Great Spirit, and also to the subordinate or inferior divinities, to propitiate their protection or avert calamity, and likewise eucharistic sacrifices for success in war." As to priests being among them, he admits that "the testimony of travellers is somewhat discordant. But those who deny that they have priests allow that in their public sacrifices the chiefs are the only persons who are permitted to officiate; while in private the head of every family discharges the

[47] Captain Kotzebue's Voyage round the World in 1823, 1824, 1825, 1826.

sacerdotal functions, agreeably to the practice of the patriarchal times."[48]

If we cast our eye over the accounts which we have received of the state of religion in Africa, there too we shall find many traces of the universality of pious emotions, however perverted and corrupted.

"The belief of one God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, is entire and universal among the Africans." But "the pagan natives do not think it necessary to offer up prayers and supplications to him, except on the appearance of a new moon," when they do pray to him, "because their fathers did it before them."[49] "Among the different tribes, however, in the different parts of the vast habitation of these children of Ham, their secondary divinities and their religious observances are very different."[50] All sorts of objects are worshipped,—even "demons, or evil spirits."[51]

Throughout the islands and the vast regions of Asia, devotion is still more observable, but still more sunk in all the vileness of idolatry and the bigotry of error. In many places, the feeling of piety is strong, but totally perverted; while in others, slight indications of the truth appear in the acknowledgment of one Supreme God.

In Madagascar, "the pagans have no places of religious worship, but they pray with great earnestness to Zangahara on particular occasions. They believe in a Su-

[48] Dr. Jarvis, in a Sermon quoted in Adam's Religious World Displayed, ed. 1824, pp. 481, 482.

[49] Mungo Park's Travels, p. 309.

[50] Adam's Religious World, p. 477.

[51] Winterbottom on the Natives of Sierra Leone, in ibid. p. 476.

preme Being, whom they call by that name."[52] "Every family has also its guardian angel, or particular spirit, generally the soul of a departed ancestor, to whom they address their prayers, and whom, by means of an owley (a sort of ephod), they consult in any critical situation."[53]

In Sumatra, "the Battas, an extensive populous nation, acknowledge the one and only great God, under the title of *Dibata Assi Assi*, and they have a trinity of great gods, supposed to have been created by him,"[54] whom they worship.

In Japan, "the Sintos acknowledge a Supreme Being, who they believe dwells in the highest heavens; and admit of inferior gods, whom they place among the stars; but they worship and invoke those gods only whom they believe to have the sovereign control over this world."[55]

In Hindostan, the pagans are divided into a great multitude of sects; but all profess to have some object or other of worship. One of these sects, the Sikhs, who inhabit the Punjab, a district of country lying among the branches of the Indus and bordering on Persia, is said to have a creed of "pure deism, mixed with the absurdities of Hindooism and the faults of Mohammedanism,"[56] and pray "against temptation, for grace to do good, for the general good of mankind, and for a particular blessing to the Sikhs."[57]

---

[52] Adam's Religious World, p. 479.

[53] Life of Major-General Burn, 1825, p. 116.

[54] Life of Sir Stamford Raffles, p. 425.

[55] Kemper's Hist. of Japan, in Adam's Religious World, p. 462.

[56] Colonel Malcolm, in ibid. p. 469.

[57] Mr. Wilkins, in ibid. p. 471.

Another of these sects, the Saadhs, "discovered a few years ago near Delhi, and who appear to be a class of seceders from the Hindoo idolatry, are also pure deists, and their form of worship is most simple. All parade is forbidden. Secret prayer is commanded;" but "chanting a hymn is the only mode of public worship used by them."[58]

"On the coasts of Coromandel and Malabar, the Brachmans, or Bramins, teach that the supreme infinite substance is to be contemplated in a state of entire abstraction and tranquillity of mind, and cannot be worshipped but through the medium of inferior divinities."[59]

In China "there is no state religion. But none are, in fact, more superstitious than the common Chinese. Besides the habitual offices of devotion on the part of the priests and females, the temples are particularly frequented by the disciples of *Fo*, previously to any undertaking of importance."[60]

"In Ceylon, the Burman empire, Siam, and Laos, under the name of Godama, or Gautama, throughout China under that of Fo, and in Japan by the name of Siaka, Boodh, or Boodhu, is worshipped to this day, and his doctrines are implicitly received."[61]

In the great mass of the rest of mankind, Judaism, Mohammedanism, and the Greek, Romish, and Protest-

---

[58] Adam's Religious World. W. H. Trant, in ibid. pp. 471–473.

[59] Brucker's History of Philosophy, by Enfield, vol. ii. pp. 622, 623.

[60] Sir George Staunton's Account of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China, ed. 2d, vol. ii. p. 259; Barrow's Travels in China, in Adam's Religious World, pp. 460, 461.

[61] Marshman's Clavis Sinica, 4to, p. 152; ibid. p. 457.

ant forms of Christianity chiefly prevail, and show the working of some kind of pious feeling in all.

But indications of this feeling have not been confined to modern times. However far backward we look into the history of any nation, we behold many proofs of the universality of devotional impressions among men.

In all ages of the world, "heathens have, by the light of nature, deduced the existence and attributes of God from his works, and particularly those of the heavens. So they have, at the same time, collected what the principal duties are which men owe to God, so reasonable, so natural, so manifest they are to all mankind."[62] "Wherever the light of nature taught men to acknowledge the being of a god, to that god also it directed them to pray."[63]

The Scripture history, and the oldest profane authors, make us acquainted with the worship which prevailed in the times before the Mosaic institution; and since then, to the present day, we have an uninterrupted series of testimonies to the universality of devotional practices.[64] "Religion was, in the early times, looked upon by all the nations in the world as a positive institution of God;"[65] and therefore, in the history of all nations, religion, of some kind or other, occupies a conspicuous place. "Every nation had its respective gods, over which presided one more excellent than the rest. The gods of the East were different from those of the Gauls, the Germans, and the other Northern nations. The Grecian divinities differed

[62] Derham's Astro-Theology, ed. 13th, p. 207.

[63] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.

[64] Parkhurst's Heb. Lex. verb. שׁחה ed. 5th, pp. 445, 454.

[65] Shuckford's Connections, ed. 2d vol. ii. p. 102.

widely from those of the Egyptians. Each people also had their own particular manner of worshipping and appeasing their respective deities, entirely different from the sacred rites of other countries."[66]

The manifestations of religious feeling and modes of worship which prevailed in Egypt, Arabia, Chaldea, Persia, Syria, and the other countries with which the ancient Jews had any national intercourse, are well known to every one acquainted with sacred history, and need not be detailed in this place.

Every historical work on Greece also abounds with evidences of the disposition to religion which prevailed among that people from the earliest periods of their national existence. "By the light of nature they were taught to say, 'We must begin with prayer to the gods for their blessing on our undertaking.'"[67] Nay, they "were so excessively superstitious that in Hesiod's time they had no less than thirty thousand gods. So fearful were the Athenians of omitting any that, as Pausanias tells us, they erected altars to unknown gods."[68] Of this we find an evidence in these words, which the Apostle Paul, many ages afterwards, addressed to their philosophers in the midst of Mars-hill: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious; for, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: '*To the Unknown God.*'"[69]

In all the surrounding states, more or less of the same spirit was also manifest. Whence we are informed by

---

[66] Mosheim's Church History, vol. i. p. 23.

[67] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. i. p. 160.

[68] Potter's Antiquities of Greece, book ii. chap. 1.

[69] Acts xvii. 22, 23.

Plato that "at the rising both of the sun and moon, one might everywhere behold the Greeks and Barbarians, those in prosperity as well as those under calamities and afflictions, prostrating themselves, and hear their supplications."[70]

The Romans, from the very first intimation which we have of them as a people, were distinguished by their devotion to their gods. These they "divided into gods of primary and secondary rank. Heroes ranked among their gods, on account of their virtue or merit; also nymphs, or female deities, who presided over all parts of the earth, mountains, woods, rivers, fountains, the sea. &c. The Romans also worshipped the virtues and affections of the mind, and the like, even vices and diseases; and, under the emperors, likewise foreign deities; also the winds and the tempests; and certain gods that they might do them good, and others that they might not hurt them."[71] [72]

In the time of Tertullian, "every province and every city had their own gods;"[73] and not long afterwards, Minucius Felix took notice of this fact in these terms: "Throughout the whole of the governments, provinces, and towns, we see that the Gentiles have each their own religious rites, and worship the gods peculiar to their own town, as the Eleusinians do Ceres, the Phrygians Cybele, the Epidaurians Esculapius, the Chaldeans Belus, the Syrians Astarte, the Taurians Diana, the Gauls Mercury, and the Romans adopt the rites of all nations."[74]

---

[70] Plato de Legibus, lib. x.

[71] Adam's Roman Antiquities, ed. 7th, pp. 263, 265, 267, 268.

[72] Cicero Tusc. i. 13, in ibid.

[73] Minucius Felix, in Octavio, ed. 1672, p. 43. [74] Ibid. pp. 43–49.

"The Celtic nations had many divinities, which they supposed to preside over different parts of nature, and which they worshipped under various names, such as Odin, Thor, Tusico, &c. No divinity was more generally worshipped, both among the Celts and Scythians, than the earth,"[75] the "Hertha" of Tacitus.[76]

The Gauls, Germans, and Britons had religious sentiments and rites all very much alike. "With regard to their ancient religion, they exactly agreed in worshipping the Supreme Deity, under the name of Esus, or Hesus, falsely said by Roman authors to have been Mars or Mercury."[77] For a long period of time "this notion of a Supreme Deity was religiously preserved by their druids. The worship of the true God was carefully kept up, and the oak esteemed the symbol of the Deity, as fire was among the Perses."[78]

But, after these nations became much connected with the Romans, they lost their original ideas of the unity and supremacy of God, and fell into all the corruptions of idolatry. Polytheism had made so great progress among the Gauls by the middle of the first century of the Christian era, that "the whole country was filled with Roman temples, all their deities were adopted and worshipped, and scarcely any traces left of their ancient religion. One of these temples was dedicated to a hundred deities."[79]

As to the Scythians and Thracians, their "uncivilized state, and their roving manner of life, have permitted

---

[75] Brucker's History of Philosophy, by Enfield, vol. i. p. 90.
[76] Tacitus de Moribus Germanorum, cap. 40.
[77] Ancient Universal History, vol. xix. p. 24.
[78] Ibid. vol. xviii. p. 540. [79] Ibid. p. 566.

few particulars, either respecting their transactions or opinions, to pass down to posterity. But there can be little doubt that, like the Celtic nations who migrated from them, they acknowledged the existence of a Supreme Divinity, and the immortality of the soul."[80] Nay, Herodotus tells us that the Scythians offered sacrifices, and "called on the name of that god to whom they sacrificed before they slew the beast."[81]

"The ancestors of the Tartars were immersed in idolatry, and worshipped some of the principal Greek and Roman deities."[82]

"The Chinese nation, according to the assertion of the canonical books, for the space of two thousand years acknowledged, reverenced, and honoured with sacrifices a Supreme Being and Sovereign Lord of the Universe."[83] "The chief object of their worship at first was the Supreme Being, the Lord and sovereign principle of all things, whom they adored under the name of Shangte, that is, supreme emperor, or Tien, which signifies the same thing."

Thus "it is apparent, from the situation of the human race under almost every diversity of condition, that religious opinion has exerted a powerful influence over their feelings, their sentiments, and their conduct,"[84] in all ages of the world.

---

[80] Brucker's History of Philosophy, vol. i. p. 102.

[81] Johnson's Unbloody Sacrifice, 1718, vol. ii. p. 88, and Herodotus, lib. iv. cap. 60, 61.

[82] Ancient Univ. Hist., vol. xx. p. 12.

[83] Du Halde's History of China, ed. 1736, vol. iii. p. 72; and Ancient Univ. Hist., vol. xx. p. 126.

[84] Cook's View, vol. i. p. 2.

From all this the conclusion is obvious. A principle so universally felt, however frequently and greatly perverted and abused, constitutes a part of our common nature; for such a tendency to devotion would not be felt in all, unless it were a part of the original constitution of all. Every one, therefore, who does not pray, checks his best emotions and acts against his nature.

O thou who hast the hearts of all men in thy keeping, and canst turn them whithersoever thou wilt, be pleased to preserve me from the guilt of checking the impulse to piety which thou hast given me, and keep my soul in constant communion with thee. Amidst the greater advantages of the situation in which thou hast placed me, oh, let me not live a less godly life than thousands to whom less has been given. Let them not rise up in judgment against me, for Christ's sake. Amen.

4. But that nature prompts to the duty of prayer is still further evident from the confession and acts of avowed infidels, and of persons of irreligious habits, when freely expressing their sentiments in seasons of serious reflection, when labouring under strong compunctions of mind for past impieties, and when taken by surprise, or thrown off their guard by sudden, unexpected, and alarming circumstances.

Lord Bolingbroke allowed that "the religion and law of nature show us the Supreme Being, manifested in all his works, to be the true and only object of our adoration; and that it teaches us, no doubt, to address ourselves to the Almighty in a manner consistent with an entire resignation to his will;"[85] and Gibbon called the

[85] Leland's View of Deistical Writers, ed. 5th, vol. ii. p. 38.

gospel a "sublime theory,"[86] and a "model of pure and perfect simplicity;"[87] which, of course, implies a spirit of prayer; for otherwise it could not be "sublime and perfect."

Lord Chesterfield, after long experience of the heartless and miserable nature of dissipated and ungodly habits, made the following remarkable confession, which evidently implies a conviction that if he had devoted his life to God, instead of the world, the result would have been very different from what it was: "I have run the silly round of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and, consequently, know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which in truth is very low, whereas those who have not experienced always overrate them. They only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with their glare. But I have been behind the scenes; I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes which exhibit and move the gaudy machine; I have seen and smelt the tallow candles which illuminate the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant multitude. When I reflect upon what I have seen, and what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry and bustle and pleasure of the world had any reality; but I look upon all that has passed as one of those romantic dreams which opium commonly occasions; and I do by no means desire to repeat the nau-

---

[86] Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. 1826, vol. i. p. 450.

[87] Ibid. vol. ii. p. 212.

seous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream."[88] Solomon declaring all to be vanity of vanities, Manasseh returning from his sins to God, Nebuchadnezzar honouring the King of heaven, Diocletian laying aside royal cares and retiring to the peace of private life, and Charles the Fifth exchanging the pomp and power of empire for the obscurity and humility of a cell, are all instances of feeling and conduct more or less resembling those of his lordship when he thus acknowledged the unsatisfying nature of worldly things and showed that he felt the need of those supplies that are given only to devotion. In all these cases, not excepting even the heathen Diocletian himself, who had so long laboured to keep up the falling shrines of paganism and utterly destroy the Christian name in every part of the Roman empire, there were manifestations of the working of that part of our nature which cannot be satisfied with any worldly attainments, and which seeks its happiness in the higher enjoyments of moral and religious views.

Voltaire had been accustomed for years to call the adorable Saviour "the wretch," and to vow that he would crush him. He closed many of his letters to his infidel friends with these words: "Crush the wretch."[89] From a man who manifested so bitter a spirit, and had done so much against religion, one could have hardly expected any admission in its favour. Yet, when writing to a nobleman who seemed to pay much deference to his opinion, he made use of these words: "My dear marquis, there is nothing good in atheism. This system is very bad, both in physics and morals.

---

[88] Lord Chesterfield's Letters. [89] Pike's True Happiness, p. 201.

Will men be more virtuous for not acknowledging a God who enjoins the practice of virtue? Assuredly not. I would have princes and their ministers to acknowledge a God,—nay, more, a God who punishes and who pardons."[90] Again: "Wherever society is established, there it is necessary to have religion; for religion, which watches over the crimes that are secret, is, in fact, the only law which a man carries about with him, —the only one which places the punishment at the side of the guilt, and which operates as forcibly in solitude and darkness as in the broad and open face of day. Would the reader have thought it? These are the words of Voltaire."[91] Even Robespierre himself, whose reign of blood and terror may be considered as an exhibition of all the wildness of infidelity in its most unrestrained state, "felt that irreligion is the soul of anarchy, and was desirous to establish the worship of the Supreme Being."[92]

Notwithstanding the dissipated life, and the immoral tendency of many parts of the writings, of the late Lord Byron, which led many honest-minded persons to count him an infidel, his friend Count Gamba maintained that he was no stranger to devotional sentiments. "I had occasion," said he, "to observe him often, in those situations in which the most sincere sentiments of the mind are unfolded, in serious danger of the stormy sea, or otherwise; and I have observed his emotions and his thoughts to be deeply tinctured with religion."[93] And

[90] Voltaire's Correspondence, 12, 349, in Brewster's Testimonies, p. 7.

[91] Fuller's Gospel its own Witness, ed. 1830, p. 67.

[92] Presbyterian Review for September, 1832, p. 574.

[93] Count Gamba's Letters.

his lordship himself, when conversing with another person on this subject, said, "Prayer does not consist in the act of kneeling, nor in repeating certain words in a solemn manner. But devotion is the affection of the heart, and this I feel; for when I view the wonders of creation, I bow to the majesty of Heaven; and when I feel the enjoyments of life, health, and happiness, I feel grateful to God for having bestowed them upon me."[94] Further, in his lordship's reply to a letter addressed to him by one who felt an interest in his welfare, he made use of these expressions: "Indisputably, the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason, that if true they will have their reward hereafter, and if there be no hereafter they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment, since (at the worst for them) out of nothing nothing can arise, not even sorrow."[95] The Earl of Rochester admitted that "the whole system of religion, if believed, was a more secure foundation of happiness than any other," and declared "that he would give all he was master of to be under persuasions of its truth, and to have the comfort and support which necessarily flow from them."[96] And well he might say so, from the bitter feelings which his irreligious conduct often occasioned, as the following anecdote will show. "At an atheistical meeting in the house of a person of quality, where he undertook to manage the cause of infi-

---

[94] Kennedy's Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron.

[95] Sheppard's Thoughts, ed. 6th, p. 317.

[96] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 43.

delity and was the principal disputant against God and religion, he maintained the contest with such ingenuity and success that his performance received the applause of the whole company. But this awful exhibition of irreverence and impiety he could not contemplate without some feeling of remorse. The strange inconsistency of his conduct struck his mind so forcibly that he immediately expressed to himself, 'Good God! that a man who walks upright, and sees the wonderful works of God, and has the use of his senses and his reason, should use them to the denying of his Creator!' Many such occasions of reprehension and remorse occurred during his career of unbridled licentiousness. He had often moments full of terrors, and sad intervals of melancholy reflections, in which he felt in all its bitterness the deep anguish that springs from a wounded heart."[97]

Count Struensee had, for a long time, similar compunctions of mind, when running his profligate career, as appears from the account which he gave of himself to Dr Munter; and when better feelings began to take possession of his soul, he said, "There is but one thing in this world that makes me really and continually uneasy, which is, that I have seduced others to irreligion and wickedness. It is my most fervent wish, nay, my own happiness depends on it, that God would show mercy to all those I have by any means turned from him, and call them back to religion and virtue. I pray for this to God most fervently."[98] "I formerly thought that whoever embraced Christianity was to renounce all

---

[97] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. pp. 18, 19. [98] Ibid. p. 153.

reason. But now I see plainly that nothing stands more to reason than it does."[99]

The confession of Cardinal Wolsey, when very nearly in a similar situation, is well known to every reader in English history. He said, "a little before he expired, 'Had I served God as diligently as I have served the king, he would not have given me over in my gray hairs. But this is the just reward that I must receive for my indulgent pains and study, not regarding my service to God, but only to my prince.'"[100]

Imminent danger, or the appearance of the near approach of death, also, very often calls forth nature from its hiding-place, even in the most hardened unbelievers, who have long borne down its efforts to maintain the cause of God, and obliged it for a time to lie by in secrecy and silence.

"The apprehensions of death will soon bring the most profligate," said the Duke of Buckingham, "to a proper use of their understanding. I am haunted by remorse, despised by my acquaintance, and, I fear, forsaken by my God. How despicable is that man who never prays to God but in the time of his distress!"[101] Of this, Voltaire and Paine were very remarkable instances. As to Voltaire, "dangerous sickness and approaching death, though they could not soften the hard heart of the hypocrite infidel into real penitence, filled him with agony, remorse, and despair." Those about him "could hear him, the prey of anguish and dread, alternately suppli-

[99] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 135.

[100] Hume's History of England, ed. 1811, vol. iv. p. 251.

[101] The Duke of Buckingham's Letter to Dr. Barlow, in Br. Test. p. 73.

cating or blaspheming that God whom he had conspired against; and in plaintive accents would he cry out, 'O Christ! O Jesus Christ!' and then complain that he had been abandoned by God and man."[102] As to Paine, we have it on the evidence of "Dr. Manley, a respectable physician who attended him in his last illness, that there was something very remarkable in his conduct for about two weeks before his death. He would call out during his paroxysms of distress, without intermission, 'O Lord, help me! God, help me! Jesus Christ, help me! O Lord, help me!' repeating the same expressions, without the least variation, in a tone that would alarm the whole house. How apparent is it from this that the mind of Paine was convinced of the truth of that religion which he had ridiculed, and whose author he had blasphemed!"[103] It has been said that "he who cannot pray should go to sea," where the dangers of the deep would alarm his fears and teach him to call on Him who rides upon the waves and rules the tempest at will. "A storm will teach the profanest mariner to pray, and that with continuance and fervency." When the tempest came down upon the ship which was carrying the prophet Jonah to[104] Tarshish, "the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god."[105]

Colonel Gardner, before his conversion, and when his mind was in its most hardened state, was overtaken by a violent storm, on his passage in a packet-boat between England and France. Being "tossed several hours in a

---

[102] Pike's True Happiness, pp. 202–204.

[103] Ibid. pp. 207, 208, 210.

[104] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1825, p. 303.

[105] Jonah i. 5.

dark night on the coast of Holland, he was brought into such extremity that the captain of the vessel urged him to go to prayers immediately, if ever he intended to do it at all; for he concluded they would in a few minutes be at the bottom of the sea. In this circumstance he did pray, and that very fervently, too; and it was very remarkable that while he was crying to God for deliverance the wind fell, and quickly after they arrived at Calais. But he was so little affected with what had befallen him that when some of his gay friends, on hearing the story, rallied him upon the efficacy of his prayers, he excused himself from the scandal of being thought much in earnest, by saying that it was at midnight, an hour when his mother and aunt were asleep, or else he should have left that part of the business to them."[106]

"When traversing one of the North American lakes in a vessel which had been much damaged by a storm, and was every moment in danger of sinking, Volney, the infidel, showed how little his philosophy could do when nature wanted help from God. There were many female as well as male passengers on board; but no one exhibited so strong marks of fearful despair as Volney. In the agony of his mind, he threw himself on the deck, exclaiming, with uplifted hands and streaming eyes, 'O my God, what shall I do? what shall I do?'" And yet, in the true spirit of all such, he afterwards said "that these words escaped from him in the instant of alarm, but had no meaning."[107]

Something similar to this is said to have taken place some years ago in a vessel which was conveying Lord

[106] Doddridge's Life of Colonel Gardner, ed. 1817, p. 34.

[107] Volney, in Buck's Anecdotes, vol. ii. pp. 144, 145.

Byron, and, along with him, Shelley, the poet, and others, from one port of the Mediterranean to another. The noble bard's friend was an ostentatious professor of irreligious opinions. But when a tempest arose, and all on board were in danger of perishing among the waves, his boastful spirit for a time entirely forsook him, and he cast himself down on the cabin-floor, where he lay in a dreadful state of mental suffering, criminating himself, and calling on God for mercy, though at other times he pretended to own no God but nature. The meanness of the whole of this exhibition of inconsistency made some who beheld it look upon him with pity, and others with contempt.

An exhibition of the same kind was once witnessed by a friend of the writer of these pages, on his passage by sea from London to Leith. A loquacious advocate of infidelity was on board. A violent tempest arose, and did so much damage to the ship that it was with the utmost difficulty it could be kept from sinking. Hope began to forsake the most fearless; but none seemed so much distressed as the poor infidel. His loquacity ceased, and he sunk into a state of despair. At intervals, however, he gave utterance to many incoherent speeches, confessions, and resolutions of a change of life. When the weather became more moderate, they were enabled to bring the ship into an English port on a Sabbath morning. Some of the passengers went ashore to attend public worship. The infidel, forgetting his professions of repentance, went in search of a gaming-house and a billiard-table.

There are, no doubt, many other persons still alive who have witnessed instances of humbled and trembling im-

piety similar to some of those now described. They have beheld the profane and godless in times of real danger laying aside their boastful manner, and labouring under all the agonies of conscious guilt and terror, and have heard them calling for pardon and help on the very Being whom at other times they held in derision, and whose existence they even pretended, on many occasions, to deny. So true it is that the most irreligious are the most cowardly and superstitious in situations that require a firm and fearless mind.

The power of nature, however, thus rising against the usurped authority of infidelity, and compelling the guilty soul in its extremity to cry to God for deliverance, is no new thing in the history of mankind. Such instances have been common in all ages of the world, and in all nations. The following are a very few out of the multitudes that might be mentioned as recorded in ancient history.

"It is recorded by Æschylus that the Persian messenger, in his narrative to the king of the overthrow of his army by the Grecians, related that those gallants who before the fight, in the midst of their cups and bravery, denied God and providence, as secure of victory, yet afterwards, when, furiously pursued by the enemy, they came to the river Strymon, which was frozen and began to thaw," (then) "upon their knees they mournfully implored the favour of God, that the ice might hold and give them a safe passage over from their pursuers." [108]

"Unbelievers may be driven by bodily anguish, or by impending danger, to utter the language of piety, which till that moment was a stranger to their lips;" [109] for

[108] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. iii. p. 6.

[109] Dr. Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 17.

"nature, in extremities, has irresistible workings, and the inbred notions of the Deity, though long suppressed by imperious lusts, will then rise up in men's souls. Tullus Hostilius is another example of this. He disdained to express submission to God by acts of worship, as a thing unbecoming his royal state.[110] But when his stubborn fierce mind was broken down in his diseased body, he used all the servile rites of superstition, and recommended the people to join with him."[111]

"Bion was a declared atheist, till struck with a mortal disease, and then, as a false witness on the rack, confessed the truth, and addressed himself by prayers and vows to God for his recovery."[112]

Of all such cases, in which the true spirit of repentance is wanting, God has thus spoken: "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."[113]

From these instances of the force of truth on the minds of many either long or always disaffected to religion, we see that it is utterly impossible for all the discipline of infidelity to destroy entirely the movements of piety in the soul. In spite of all the persevering efforts of the persons now enumerated to shut God out of the mind, something within them never ceased to disturb them till it compelled them to bear testimony to religion. There is no way of accounting satisfactorily for this but by ad-

---

[110] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. iii. p. 7.

[111] Livy, book i. chap. 31.

[112] Lives of the Ancient Philosophers, ed. 1702, p. 136.

[113] Prov. i. 27, 28.

mitting that God has planted a sense of religion in our nature which the most irreligious conduct cannot entirely root out.

Thus, then, it appears, from each of the arguments illustrated in this section, and from a collective view of the whole of them, that nature prompts to prayer, because the principle of piety from which it flows is a part of our nature. Consequently, we cannot cease to pray without doing violence to our nature, and that, too, in its best affections, its finest feelings. Let the admirers of nature, who advocate the sufficiency of the light of nature without revelation, and confine their views to natural religion, think of this; and let it bring them more frequently to God in fervent prayer.

SECTION 3.—*We should pray, because it is a most precious and honourable privilege to be permitted to do so.*

A privilege is any particular kind of right which is granted to any person or society, and which carries along with it some distinction or advantage withheld from others. Thus, when our sins had rendered us offensive to our God, and placed us in a state of distance from him, it pleased him, for Christ's sake, to give us permission to approach him in the acts of devotion, to lay before him our wants and wishes without reserve, and to receive from him, in return, such supplies as our state requires. This is a right which we could have never claimed as due to us; a right which has not been extended, so far as we know, to other fallen creatures; and a right which is intimately connected with[1] every blessing that God, in

[1] See next section, *passim*.

his mercy, sends us. "To worship is the good man's privilege, and it is among his griefs that he can enjoy it no better."[2]

1. To be permitted to pray is a most precious privilege. Its value is evident, in so far as we ourselves are so weak and wicked that we could have never done any thing of sufficient worth to procure it. "Our first interest in God was so lost by sin that there was left to us, in ourselves, no possibility of a recovery. As we had deprived ourselves of all power for a return, so God had not revealed any way of access to himself, or that he could, under any consideration, be approached in peace."[3]

"When we consider how great, glorious, and holy the Almighty is, and how guilty and vile we are, the question seems not so much to be whether the sinner ought to pray, as whether he may be allowed to come with his supplications into the presence of his offended sovereign." For "though, under the New Testament, we are invited to 'come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,' yet we have no access except by the 'new and living way,' which Jesus Christ has consecrated for us, through the veil; that is to say, his flesh given as a sacrifice for sin, and by his priesthood, which is the substance of all ancient shadows."[4]

"Consider what a mercy it is, O man, that God is yet calling thee to prayer, and continuing thee in the land of prayer, when so many thousands, as deserving, are

---

[2] Walker's Christian, ed. 6th, p. 234.

[3] Owen on Communion, ed. 1808, p. 8.

[4] Scott's Essays, ed. 5th, p. 383.

beyond prayer, and lost forever."[5] "Souls now in eternal ruin are not privileged to pray. They have irrecoverably lost this good. Fallen angels have no way of access to God. Jesus took not on him the nature of angels. Shall we, then, slight or despise the distinguishing privilege of the present life?"[6] Truly, "it is a most high privilege and advantage to us, that we are allowed to pray and address our devotions to God."[7] Well may we say, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"[8] "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts," and "be satisfied with the goodness of thy house."[9]

All this shows that we could have had no part in the procuring of the privilege of prayer, that we could have had no merit equal to its value, which we could have balanced against it. Our righteousness never could have extended to God, to give us any title to come near to him in the acts of devotion, and be accepted. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Sin cannot stand in his presence; and we have always been sinners. Nor could we have ever cleansed ourselves from sin, by mere human means, to give us any right to appear before him. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."[10] "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."[11]

"Can the lifeless carcase shake off its grave-clothes,

---

[5] Willison's Sabbath, p. 154, ed. 1819.

[6] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 13.

[7] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.

[8] Ps. viii. 4.

[9] Ps. lxv. 4.

[10] Job xiv. 4.

[11] Isa. lxiv. 6.

and loose the bands of death? Then mayest thou recover thyself who art dead in trespasses and sins, and under an impossibility of serving thy Maker acceptably in this condition;"[12] for "they that are in the flesh cannot please God."[13]

If we set a high value on any thing which cannot be obtained but with the greatest difficulty, how much more value ought we to set on what could not have been procured by any exertion of ours or any effort of human nature! and if the privilege of prayer, when thus estimated, is found to be so much more valuable than all the resources of man, how diligently ought we to attend to it! When we obtain any worldly privilege, however unimportant it may be, we generally adhere to it with great tenacity, and take advantage of it as much as we can. And shall we neglect the greatest privilege of the present life, which all the wealth and wisdom and excellence of man could have never procured for a single soul of all the millions of the human race who now enjoy this blessing? Gracious God, forbid it, and teach us thy will herein. Amen.

But the value of this privilege rises far above every human test that can be applied to it, as is evident from the consideration that *it could not have been procured at a less price than the blood of Christ*,—a price of infinitely greater worth than all creation could have furnished; for "if he be divine, no assignable number of creatures can equal him in value."[14]

Fallen man was so destitute, and the difficulty of re-

---

[12] Alleine's Alarm, p. 135. [13] Rom. viii. 8.

[14] Henry Martyn's Sermons, Rom. v. 20, 21.

covering him so insurmountable, that no created power could relieve him. While he was in this forlorn state, his Redeemer "looked, and there was *none* to help, and he wondered that there was *none* to uphold: therefore his *own* arm brought salvation. He trod the wine-press *alone*, and of the people there was *none* with him."[15] Hence it is that "we have *access* by faith unto this grace wherein we stand."[16] We "who were far off are made nigh *by the blood of Christ;* for *through him* we have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father."[17]

Our situation thus resembles, in some measure, that of "those Israelites who were not under any ceremonial pollution, or who were cleansed from their guilt by the blood of atonement, and so had free liberty of entering the temple and conversing with God, hence called[18] 'a people near to him.'"[19] "In the exceeding riches of his grace, God brings the far-off nigh, and reinstates them in the privileges of his universal family. Among these privileges the right of approaching God with prayer holds a distinguished place. It particularly indicates the closeness and confidence of the relation which God establishes between himself and his redeemed."[20]

"As by Christ alone the Father is reconciled to us, and by Christ alone this reconciliation is effectually announced and communicated to us, so by Christ alone we have access to God the Father."[21] "It is in him alone, and on account of his oblation and intercession, that we have any boldness to approach the Father."[22]

---

[15] Isa. lxiii. 3, 5. [16] Rom. v. 2. [17] Eph. ii. 13, 18.
[18] Ps. cxlviii. 14. [19] Doddridge on Eph. ii. 13.
[20] Wardlaw's Efficacy of Prayer, p. 6.
[21] Zanchius on Eph. ii. 18. [22] Owen on Communion, p. 138.

"The privilege of prayer was purchased for us at the costly price of the blood of Jesus Christ; and therefore we may easily imagine what a great and vast advantage it must be, and how excellent is that liberty of access unto God which was thus obtained."[23] Let us "consider at what a dear rate he hath bought this freedom for us. How much did it cost him to erect a throne of grace, to which we might repair with confidence! And will we not make use of this privilege with thanksgiving?"[24] "If we ever get to heaven, we shall know that we do not sing praises to the Lamb for nothing;" for "we came from God through the loins of the first Adam, and we return to him through the bowels of the second."[25]

For a privilege, then, which cost so much, are we to have no regard? Shall we highly estimate those earthly privileges, those national rights, which the blood of our forefathers secured to us, and by which we can freely lay down our grievances and our petitions for relief at the foot of the highest authority in the land, and shall we not estimate infinitely more highly that glorious freedom of unreserved intercourse with the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, which all created means could have never purchased, and which the Son of God alone procured for us, at the expense of sufferings unparalleled and inconceivable? Let not such a reproach rest upon our understandings. O God, may every one be taught of thee to distinguish between good and evil in this matter, and choose the good part that shall not be taken away from him, for Christ's sake. Amen.

---

[23] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 13. [24] Willison's Sabbath, p. 153.
[25] Adams's Private Thoughts, pp. 154, 155.

But, still further, the infinite value of this privilege is likewise evident from *the continual intercession* which Christ, who procured it, is carrying on in heaven, to preserve and render it availing to us.

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,"[26] "who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."[27] "He is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,"[28] as the only "mediator between God and man."[29] He is "the way, and the truth, and the life; and no man cometh unto the Father but by him."[30] But all "them that come unto God by him he is able to save unto the uttermost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."[31]

Without his constant attention to their interests, no petition which they could offer up could find its way into the holiest of all. But when supported by his intercession, every prayer must succeed. This is implied in the direction given to the disciples: "Ye shall ask in my name, and I will pray the Father for you;"[32] and in John's vision, in which he saw an angel, that "came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne; and the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand,"[33] to render them fit for being heard and granted.

---

[26] 1 John ii. 1. [27] Rom. viii. 34. [28] Heb. ix. 24.
[29] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [30] John xiv. 6. [31] Heb. vii. 25.
[32] John xvi. 26. [33] Rev. viii. 3, 4.

From this it is manifest that "even the prayers of the saints are so defective that they need the incense of our Redeemer's merit to make them acceptable to God."[34] The saints therefore "look to Christ, as him who bears the iniquities of their holy things, who adds incense to their prayers and makes them acceptable to God."[35] "The correspondence between heaven and earth is preserved and conducted by Christ alone; for no man cometh, or can come, to the Father, but by him. It is he who presents all our homage to God. It is he who transmits to him all our petitions; and by his hands all mercy and grace are conveyed to us; our most fervent prayers, the devoutest breathings of our souls, must not only be purged from that defilement which cleaves to them, but even in their greatest purity they must be offered up in his censer in order to their acceptance, and can only ascend by the incense of his sacrifice."[36] "All our safety depends upon prayer; yet all our prayers, and those of the whole church, are sustained by the prayers of our great High-Priest."[37] "He is a faithful and tender-hearted, sympathizing High-Priest, and so will not, and cannot, forget or neglect our cause."[38] "He is at this moment not idle in heaven; but, as formerly while on earth, even so now he is acting continually as the mediator, intercessor, and advocate of the elect with the Father, and conducting their cause."[39]

---

[34] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 45.

[35] Owen on Communion, p. 172.

[36] Walker's Sermons, Matt. vi. 10.

[37] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. iv. 3.

[38] Brown on Prayer, in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 50.

[39] Zanchius on 1 John ii. 1.

This view of the intercession of Christ is perfectly consistent with the arrangements of providence which we witness every day in this world. Nay, "the whole analogy of nature removes all imagined presumption against the general notion of a 'mediator between God and man;' for we find all living creatures are brought into the world, and their life in infancy is preserved, by the instrumentality of others, and every satisfaction of it, some way or other, is bestowed by the like means,"[40] by the instrumentality and mediation of others.

The whole arrangements of the Levitical service, particularly those parts of it which referred to the office of the high-priest, rested on the same principle. "The high-priest's entering into the Holy of Holies on the great day of atonement represented Christ entering with his own blood into heaven, to appear in the presence of God for us."[41] "In order to fulfil the types of the law, it was necessary that Christ should carry the blood which he had offered into the holy place.[42] Upon this account he went into heaven."[43] "This doctrine teaches us that our prayers are heard, and our services accepted, not on account of any thing in us, but purely on account of the righteousness of Him in whom the Father is well pleased;"[44] and this gives them a virtue of which they would otherwise be entirely destitute, and connects them more intimately with the divine councils than can ever be understood in the present state of things.

---

[40] Butler's Analogy, part 2, chap. 5, sec. 2.

[41] Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon, verb כרב.

[42] Heb. ix. 12.

[43] Principal Hill's Lectures, book iv. chap. 3, sec. 5.

[44] Ibid. book v. chap. 5, sec. 3.

"In reply, then, to all that may be objected to the efficacy of prayer, the believer need not hesitate to assert that it has something to do, and a great deal more, too, than he is capable of estimating, with the determinations of the divine mind; and it is this very consideration that must elevate his conceptions of it as his most precious and honourable privilege."[45]

Hence "the hope that" our "real prayers are presented and made availing by so glorious an advocate should confer, in" our "estimation, an immense importance on the privilege of worship, and should make" us "incomparably more solicitous that" our "prayers *may* be real, and that out of the *abundance* of the heart the mouth may speak."[46] O Lord, teach me more and more to value and avail myself of this precious privilege. Oh, let me never neglect, but enable me diligently to use aright, this liberty of approach unto thee, which cost my Saviour so much suffering while on earth to procure it, and still costs him so much intercession in heaven to retain and render it effectual. Oh, reveal its worth to my soul, and make me delight in its exercise for Christ's sake. Amen.

2. To be permitted to pray is, also, a most honourable privilege. That it is honourable, is evident from its *very nature and influence on the mind.* It has been declared by inspiration itself to be "pure and undefiled,"[47] "honourable and glorious;"[48] and wherever its spirit has been allowed to manifest itself, it has kept those under its power "unspotted from the world,"[49] and made them

---

[45] Gordon's Sermons, Dan. ix. 20–23.

[46] Sheppard's Thoughts, ed. 6th, pp. 137, 138.

[47] James i. 27. [48] Ps. cxi. 3. [49] James i. 27.

abound in "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report."[50] If this be not honourable, nothing else deserves the name. Infidelity has nothing in its spirit or effects that can bear a comparison with it. Nay, "they that deny a God" (and every one does so virtually who does not pray to him) "destroy a man's nobility; for certainly man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature." Infidelity "destroys likewise magnanimity, and the raising of human nature;"[51] but true devotion elevates and ennobles the mind.

"Prayer is itself the exercise of our best feelings."[52] "It is elevation of the mind towards the Supreme Being, and extension of the thoughts of another life."[53] "It opens the mind to great conceptions, and fills it with more sublime ideas than any that are to be met with in the most exalted science, and, at the same time, warms and agitates the soul more than sensual pleasures."[54] "If piety did not excite sublime emotions, who would sacrifice even sensual pleasures, however vulgar they might be, to the cold dignity of reason?"[55] "In the blessed exercises of a spiritual devotion, the soul is borne away for a time from all the perishable objects of sense, to appear in the very sanctuary of God, there to learn what the voice of man can never teach, to feel

---

[50] Phil. iv. 8.
[51] Lord Bacon's Essays, 1825, p. 134.
[52] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 8.
[53] Dr. Johnson, Idler, No. 89.
[54] Addison, Spectator, No. 201.
[55] De Stael's Germany, iii. 209; Br. Test. p. 29.

what the profane and thoughtless can never appreciate."[56]

"It is a mark of the deepest wisdom, of the highest grandeur and nobleness of spirit, to hold constant intercourse with the God of heaven and earth."[57] "In what is grand and elevated in our nature," true religion "sympathizes most; for if men are animated by noble thoughts, if they respect their intelligence, their chief ornament, if they are interested about the dignity of their nature, they will fly with transport to bow before religion" (that is, to worship God), "which ennobles their faculties, preserves their strength of mind, and, through its sentiments, unites them to Him whose power astonishes their understandings."[58] The very "hope of future blessings" which accompanies it "imparts to the thoughts and affections that degree of elevation which seeks for intercourse with heaven."[59] To all who are really under its power, it "imparts a purer and loftier feeling of 'the things that are excellent than they ever before possessed.'"[60]

"Religion naturally tends to all that is great, worthy, friendly, generous, and noble, and is the greatest incentive to good and worthy actions."[61] In short, "there is not a disposition of the mind which is more noble in itself than piety. It hath such true grandeur in it, that, when duly performed, it exalts us to a state but

---

[56] Bowdler's Tracts, ed. 1819, p. 255.

[57] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 235.

[58] Necker's Religious Opinions, 127, in Br. Test. 55.

[59] Principal Hill's Lectures, book v. chap. 5, sec. 3.

[60] Dr. Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 87.

[61] Wilkes's Advice, ed. 8th, p. 58.

little lower than the angels. 'Thereby,' says an admired ancient, 'we build a nobler temple to the Deity than creation can present.'"[62]

What thus purifies and spiritualizes, what thus exalts and ennobles the thoughts and affections, must be honourable. What leads to God and lives in God, the Fountain of honour, and receives of the fulness of his excellence to elevate and adorn our nature, is in reality honour itself, in the highest form it can assume, and putting forth its efforts in the purest acts that can be performed in this imperfect and polluted world. Prayer, then, being a state and action of the soul embodying so much sublimity and dignifying our sentiments with so much spirituality, must be a privilege honourable beyond any other here enjoyed by man. Who, then, but fools would think meanly of it? O God, let not me be of that number, but enable me to give myself continually unto prayer, and to count it my highest honour to seek and serve Thee. Amen.

But that it is most honourable, is also evident from its *associating the true worshipper, in act and feeling, with the highest and holiest of God's creatures on earth beneath and heaven above, and even with Christ and the Holy Spirit, who are infinitely higher and holier than all creatures, and yet carry on the work of prayer in our behalf.*

"The Christian who does not pray cuts himself off from the assembly of the holy, and is worse than an unbeliever."[63] Even heathens have always counted the worship of their gods so honourable that on all public

---

[62] Logan's Sermons, Rom. xii. 11.
[63] Massillon's Serm., Matt. xv. 22.

occasions, at least, they have committed the right of officiating to the most exalted and revered members of their respective communities. "To sacrifice to the First Being of the Universe required, in the opinion of the ancient Chinese, no less than the most exalted person in the empire; to the end that, the emperor thus humbling himself in the presence of his court, by the sacrifices offered in the name of the empire to the Master of the World, the sovereign authority of the Supreme Being might still shine more resplendently, and appear exalted above an equal. Other kings, too, presiding over countries nearer our part of the world, had the priesthood annexed to the royal dignity in them."[64] Thus, "we have no reason to think, from any thing we can find in the Greek history, that the ancient Greeks, until some ages after Homer, had any other public ministers of religion than those who were the kings and governors of the state;"[65] and among the Romans, from their earliest history down to the times when their emperors became Christians, or, more correctly speaking, "when Gratian ascended the throne,"[66] each of the supreme rulers of the state had the title of the Supreme Priest (*Pontifex Maximus*), or the chief of the ministers of religion, attached to his office. Nay, to the present day, the chiefs of tribes in many parts of the world have continued to act as high-priests in the rites of the various kinds of religion which they have professed.

In all these cases, and many others of the same kind

---

[64] Ancient Universal History, vol. xx. pp. 128, 129.

[65] Shuckford's Connections, ed. 2d, vol. ii. pp. 94, 95. See Homer's Iliad, book ii. lines 411–418, &c.

[66] Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. ii. p. 201.

which might easily be enumerated, the persons who were esteemed most honourable were considered fittest for the office of representing the public wants of their people to the Almighty. If heathens, then, by the mere light of nature, have formed so high an estimate of divine worship, how strange is it that multitudes of professing Christians, with the additional light of the gospel shining around them, should hold the service of God so low, and those who perform it in such contempt, as even to be ashamed both of it and them! (God forgive them, and bring them, in thy mercy, to a better state of mind.)

In this we have an instance of most melancholy delusion; for the noble nature of piety has just now been proved, as well as that of the spirit which it imparts to those under its power. It is, indeed, a matter of history and experience, that "all those who stand the highest of the human race for their excellency in the sight of God were most eminent and abundant in the exercise of prayer."[67] "The most useful men in the Church of Christ have been eminent for piety and a devotional spirit."[68] "Wherever the holy men of old came to reside, their first care was to erect in their dwelling an altar to God. To call upon the name of the Lord in the bosom of their families, was a duty with which they allowed nothing to interfere. And so deeply impressed were they with the obligation and the happy effects of this service that they commanded their children, and their households after them, carefully to observe it."[69]

---

[67] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 265.

[68] Williams's Calvinism, chap. 7, par. 15.

[69] Malcolm's Family Worship, ed. 2d, p. 1.

The instances of habitual devotion in eminent men, recorded in sacred history, are too numerous to be quoted in this place; but we may call to our remembrance Noah,[70] Abraham,[71] Isaac,[72] Jacob,[73] Moses,[74] Joshua,[75] Samuel,[76] David,[77] Elijah,[78] Daniel,[79] Peter,[80] Paul,[81] and, above all, our Saviour.

It would also be impossible to quote the many instances of this kind which are mentioned in the uninspired records of the Christian church. It may, however, be generally remarked that in the earlier periods of Christianity, "besides stated devotions, true believers were assiduous in their addresses to the Supreme Being, and poured forth frequently their vows and supplications before his throne, because they considered prayer as the most essential duty, as well as the noblest employment, of a sanctified nature."[82] In all ages, indeed, wherever we have any account of the life of a good man, there we invariably find a man of prayer.

To engage, therefore, seriously and truly in the work of religion, is to unite with the most estimable among men in the same ennobling acts, and to breathe the same pure and elevated spirit,—to join ourselves to the society of "the sons of God,"[83] the highest and the holiest in life and principle among the inhabitants of this world.

Nay, when thus engaged, we "are uniting in the same great work with angels and archangels in heaven, with

---

[70] Gen. vi. 9, viii. 20.
[71] Gen. xviii. 22, xxi. 33.
[72] Gen. xxiv. 63.
[73] Gen. xxxii. 24–28.
[74] Exod. xxxiv. 28.
[75] Joshua xxiv. 15.
[76] 1 Sam. xii. 23.
[77] Ps. lv. 16, 17.
[78] 1 Kings xvii. 22.
[79] Dan. vi. 10.
[80] Acts x. 9.
[81] Acts ix. 11.
[82] Mosheim's Church Hist., vol. i. p. 294.
[83] Rom. viii. 14.

the good and faithful of all ages and nations, with the spirits of just men made perfect."[84] "God hath called us to the fellowship of the angels and archangels, of the cherubim and seraphim; to the glorious company of the apostles; to the goodly fellowship of the prophets; to the noble army of martyrs; to the holy church, militant on earth and triumphant in heaven."[85]

This was the idea in the apostle's mind when he addressed these words, through the Ephesian believers, to all the true worshippers of God, in every country and every period of time: "Now ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together, for an habitation of God, through the Spirit."[86] In another place of his writings he also made use of these expressions: "Ye are come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant;"[87] and elsewhere he mentioned "the whole family in heaven and earth,"[88] as those who were named after Christ, which signifies all in time and eternity who worship God in spirit and in truth.

---

[84] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. v. 16.
[85] Bishop Pearson on the Creed, art. 9.
[86] Eph. ii. 19–22.
[87] Heb. xii. 22–24.
[88] Eph. iii. 14, 15.

"The saints on earth and those above
But one communion make;
Join'd to their Lord in bonds of love,
All of his grace partake.
One family, we dwell in him,
One church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream, of death."[89]

"The saints in prayer appear as one
In word and deed and mind,
When with the Father and the Son
Their fellowship they find.
Nor prayer is made on earth alone:
The Holy Spirit pleads,
And Jesus on th'eternal throne
For sinners intercedes."[90]

In short, he

"Who worships the Great God, that instant joins
The first in heaven, and sets his foot on hell."[91]

What nobler society than this did ever any reasonable soul desire, or even conceive? If it be an honour to be admitted into learned and far-famed associations among men, when the objects they have in view are only worldly and of short duration, it must certainly be an infinitely higher honour to be admitted into this society of God's children, whose existence, whose character, whose objects, are all eternal, and the most honourable that belong to man or angel.

A habit of prayer, therefore, being the state of soul that fits us for such a society and connects us with it, must be a most honourable privilege. If it were not,

---

[89] Wesley's Hymns. [90] Montgomery.
[91] Young's Night Thoughts, Compl. Night 8th.

it would never be practised by, and form a bond of union among, the holiest and highest of creatures, with the uncreated Son of God and Spirit of all grace leading them on in it. O my God, keep my soul continually longing after a closer connection with this assembly of the saints, and with my blessed Redeemer and Sanctifier on high. May I live with them in prayer here, that I may live with them in glory hereafter! Amen.

That it is most honourable, is yet further evident from its being *the nearest approach to God, and, consequently, the highest distinction allowed to men, while in this world.*

The spirit which prevails in many is such that, changing a few circumstances, they may be addressed as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were by Moses: "Seemeth it but a small thing unto you that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord?"[92] Instead of feeling it to be an honour to converse with God in prayer, they think it an act of meanness and degradation. "Truly this, as much as any thing that can be conceived, is a lamentable argument of the stupidity of man in his fallen state, that such an honour is so little regarded. Opportunities of conversing with nobles or princes of the earth are rare and short; and if a man of inferior station be admitted to such a favour, he glories in it as if he were raised to heaven, though they are but images of the same clay with himself, and only set upon a basis a little higher than the rest. But the liberty of daily and free converse

[92] Numb. xvi. 9.

with the King of heaven is neglected for every trifle, and, indeed, is counted as nothing."[93]

But, whatever fools may think of prayer, every man of ordinary discernment and reflection must see that there cannot be a greater honour conferred on sinful mortals than to permit them to have free "access"[94] to the greatest, the wisest, and the best of all beings. What Moses said to the people of Israel is so applicable to all true worshippers, that it may here be quoted to illustrate this view of the subject: "The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour, that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God."[95] All those who enjoy the blessings of this state of nearness to the Almighty are entitled to use the language of the apostle, and say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."[96] Which "means our being members of that religious community of which the Father and Son are the head, and our sharing in all the benefits which the members of that community derive from the Father and the Son, on account of their relation to them, as votaries or worshippers."[97] Paul has expressed the same thing in these words: "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."[98] "We are thereby admitted to nearer fellowship with God, and have our natures more assimi-

---

[93] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.
[94] Eph. ii. 18.
[95] Deut. xxvi. 18, 19.
[96] 1 John i. 3.
[97] Macknight on 1 John i. 3.
[98] 1 Cor. i. 9.

lated to his divine image."[99] Hence it is said, "The saints of God have communion with the Father, because, by the great and precious promises given unto them, they become partakers of the divine nature. What is the communion of members with the head, of branches with the vine, that is the communion of saints with Christ. Besides, the communion of the Father and the Son is wrought by the communication of the Spirit; for 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father; wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.'"[100] This is the communion which the saints enjoy with the three persons of the blessed Trinity. The "Spirit, with the Father and the Son, inhabiteth the saints."[101] For "know ye not," saith the apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"[102] "If any man love me," saith Christ, "he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."[103]

Such a state as this, in which we are admitted to the freest and most confidential intercourse with the most glorious Being in the universe, is certainly the most honourable that creatures like us can enjoy. "To have free access to the presence and audience of an earthly prince, to the effect of receiving from him all that we could desire, would be deemed a matter of great honour and much advantage. How much more so is it to us,

---

[99] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 40.
[100] Gal. iv. 6, 7.
[101] Bishop Pearson on the Creed, art. 9.
[102] 1 Cor. iii. 16.
[103] John xiv. 23.

that we are admitted to the presence and ear of the great King of all the world, so mighty in power, so large in bounty, so full of goodness and pity, so thoroughly able and so exceedingly willing to grant and perform our requests?"[104] "What an honour it is for dust and ashes to be allowed access to the great God! For a worm to speak freely to its Creator! For a poor beggar to converse familiarly with the King of heaven! O sinner, would not all thy neighbours envy thee if thou wert so honoured by an earthly king?"[105]

"Assuredly, did we conceive of it as we ought to do, did we know what it is that constitutes the honour and dignity and blessedness of our nature, there is nothing in which we should consider ourselves more highly honoured or more richly privileged than in being permitted and encouraged to pray; for what is there but littleness in every object of human ambition, what but vanity in the largest portion of worldly influence and power, compared with the honour that cometh from God, when he admits us into his presence and gives us permission freely and importunately to supplicate what shall be for his glory and our own or others' good?"[106]

"It is the *nature* of prayer that it gives to needy and sinful men, in the limited time of this life, every day, yes, every hour, this great privilege of access to the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to the Most High and the Most Holy, and this with the utmost freedom and confidence,—the access not merely of a servant to a

---

[104] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.

[105] Willison's Sabbath, ed. 1819, p. 153.

[106] Dr. Gordon's Sermons, Dan. ix. 20, 23.

master, or a subject to a king, but of a child to a tender parent."[107] "In his presence are glory and honour"[108] and "majesty;"[109] and "them that honour him he will honour."[110] And what honour is like that which he confers? All that is attached to the act of approaching the highest and most honourable of men, and even of angels, is as nothing when contrasted with that which is bestowed upon the true worshipper of the Creator and Preserver of all.

Thus it appears, from various considerations, that prayer is a privilege the most precious and the most honourable that man can enjoy in the present state of things. And is this privilege to be neglected and despised as a thing of nought? None but the most ignorant and the most wicked can think so. It is the glory of our day of grace that such a blessing belongs to us. Let us, then, use it diligently, perseveringly, and thankfully.

SECTION 4.—*We should pray, because it is useful to do so.*

To pray is useful in every respect in which it leads to any good end, in which it is accompanied with, or followed by, any kind of benefit or advantage. To point out all the uses of prayer, or enumerate the various beneficial effects which result from it, would be impossible. The field is so extensive that the whole lifetime of man here below would be too short to survey all its parts. A proper view of it can only be obtained in eternity, when "we shall no more see darkly as through

---

[107] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 2.
[108] 1 Chron. xvi. 27.
[109] Ps. xcvi. 6.
[110] 1 Sam. ii. 30.

a glass, but shall see even as we are seen." Till then, the most gifted of the human race cannot tell, nor even conceive, to what extent their prayers may have been profitable or useful to themselves or to others. Still, some of the most obvious uses or advantages of prayer must be familiar to every person of observing habits; and of these the few following may be mentioned as inducements to this duty.

1. "Prayer is very useful to discover to us the frame of our own spirits,"[1] and, thereby, to assist us in ascertaining whether we are walking in the right way or in the wrong, whether we are in a state of safety or danger.

Self-examination is an important Christian duty, which we are all required to carry on, every day we live; for every day we are liable to deceive ourselves and fall into error. "Examine yourselves," said the Apostle Paul, "whether ye be in the faith; prove your ownselves; know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?"[2] "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."[3] But Jesus Christ, or the mind which was in him, cannot be in any one who is a stranger to prayer; for he was so much devoted to this and every other act of religion that he esteemed it as his "meat to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work."[4] "Beware," said a good judge of this subject, "that none of you be a prayerless person; for that is a most certain discovery that you are a Christless and graceless person."[5] "He who does not habitually pray to God cannot be a Christian. He vio-

[1] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 206.
[2] 2 Cor. xiii. 5.
[3] Phil. ii. 5.
[4] John iv. 34.
[5] Alleine's Alarm, p. 185.

lates continually a plain command of the Scriptures, and proves himself indifferent to the great and comprehensive duty of obeying his Maker. But this is a contradiction to the whole Christian character. A hungry man might as well be expected to abstain from food, or a thirsty man from drink, as a Christian from prayer. Prayer is the breath on which Christianity lives, and from which it derives peculiarly its power, activity, and enjoyment."[6]

"No man can be a faithful servant of God, a real friend of goodness, a serious practiser of duty, without a constant tenour of devotion."[7] "A man who prays not, is a man who has no God, no worship, no hope;"[8] for "it is certain those who live without prayer live without God in the world."[9]

"Nor is the virtue of that man complete, or even consistent with itself, in whose mind the sentiments of piety are wanting."[10] "Want of pious affections is a proof of great depravity."[11] It shows that "your heart is engrossed by a foreign love;"[12] "that you love not God, that you prefer your sin before him, and that you would never part with it, if you had your will;"[13] which is the same as making a God of your sin, and manifesting such a degree of ignorance respecting both God and your own state as is utterly inconsistent with a

---

6 Dwight's Theology, Serm. 140.

7 Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.

8 Massillon's Sermon, Matt. xv. 22.

9 Henry on Prayer, pref. p. 1.

10 Stuart's Outlines of Moral Philosophy, ed. 4th, p. 239.

11 Beattie's Elements of Moral Science, 2, 80, in Br. Test. p. 285.

12 Massillon's Sermon, Matt. xv. 21.

13 Baxter's Fifty Reasons, No. 4.

true believer's views. "They know little of their own wants and emptiness, that are not much in prayer; they know little of the greatness and goodness of God, that are not much in praise."[14]

All these circumstances are evidences of an unrenewed, an unchristian state of mind, in all in whom they exist. But the reverse of all this holds true in every one whose soul is under the influence of a spirit of true devotion; for "the habitual desires of a renewed soul find their proper expression in prayer."[15]

"This is one of the first things conversion appears in, that it sets men a-praying."[16] "Prayer is a satisfactory evidence of our having obtained the saving grace[17] of God. It is the breathing of the spiritual life in the soul.[18] The first mark of it is, 'Behold, he prayeth.'[19] The last account of one is, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'[20] It is to the spiritual church the promise belongs, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,[21] the Spirit of grace and of supplications.'"[22]

"They who are new-born of the Spirit cannot live without prayer. Prayer is to them as the natural and necessary respiration of that new and divine life. It is the natural language of believing souls, by which they daily address their heavenly Father."[23] It is the natural

---

[14] Archbishop Leighton on 1 Pet. v. 11.

[15] Dr. Alexander's Introduction to an Advice to a Young Christian, p. 6.

[16] Alleine's Alarm, p. 153.

[17] Gal. iv. 6.

[18] Lam. iii. 56.

[19] Acts ix. 11.

[20] Acts vii. 59.

[21] Zech. xii. 10.

[22] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 13.

[23] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 1.

and genuine voice of the children of God. It is the proper idiom of the citizens of heaven. It expresses that by which the godly are distinguished from the rest of mankind. The spirit of the world knows not how to pray, nor does the spirit of adoption and liberty know how to forbear praying."[24] "Soldiers distinguish each other by watchwords. Let your token or distinction, as fellow-soldiers of Christ, be prayer in the name of Christ. Our Lord himself directed Ananias to distinguish Saul as his disciple, by the watchword or token of his praying."[25]

Prayer "is the channel by which God conveys spiritual light into our minds, and spiritual vigour into our hearts. It is both the seed and the food of spiritual life, by which all holy dispositions of the soul, and all honest resolutions of practice, are bred and nourished, are augmented and strengthened in us."[26] "It is the first breath of divine life; it is the pulse of the believing soul, the best criterion of health or sickness, vigour or debility."[27] "It is as essential to the true Christian as life to the body. Prayer is the very breathing of the soul to God. Art thou a Christian, O man, and canst not pray? Thou mayest as well say thou art a scholar, but canst not read; a soldier, but canst not fight."[28] "Prayer is part of our spiritual armour; and for a soldier to be without any skill in the use of his arms, is both an unsuitable and dangerous condition. A Christian that

---

[24] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 1.
[25] Macknight on Eph. vi. 18.
[26] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.
[27] Scott's Essays, p. 391.
[28] Willison's Sabbath, p. 155.

cannot pray is like an orator that cannot speak, or a traveller that cannot go."[29] "Shall any man pretend to be a minister that cannot preach? It is but a poor pretence we make to Christianity, if we are not able, at least in secret, to supply ourselves with a few meditations or expressions, to continue a little in this work of prayer."[30]

"The Christian is a man of prayer. His origin, his situation, his nature, his wants, his place of abode, all inform him that prayer is necessary;"[31] and when prayers are offered up as they ought to be, they "speak a man altogether a Christian."[32]

> "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
> The Christian's native air,
> His watchword at the gate of death.
> He enters heaven with prayer."[33]

It is evident, then, that prayer is of essential importance, as a mean of enabling us to ascertain our real state,—whether we be walking in the right way or the wrong,—whether we be renewed in the spirit of our minds or not,—whether we be really Christians or be only deceiving ourselves with a name,—whether we are in a state of safety or a state of danger. To ascertain all this is of the utmost consequence to the welfare of our souls, and should therefore be the subject of our most serious and continued meditations. Hence it follows that prayer, being so sure and easy a test, should never be neglected, if we wish to be in a state of safety and to have the comfort of knowing

---

[29] Bishop Wilkins on Prayer, ed. 1674, p. 23.
[30] Henry on Prayer.
[31] Massillon on Matt. xv. 23.
[32] Mead's Christian, 1825, p. 111.
[33] Montgomery.

it. With the spirit of prayer ever active within us, we are safe; without it, we are in darkness and undone.

2. Prayer, by restraining inward inclinations and resisting outward temptations to evil, enables us to be more faithful and profitable members of society, more upright and useful in all the relations and situations of life in which God, in his wisdom, sees fit to place us.

Not long ago, "in one country, and that the centre of Christendom, revelation underwent a total eclipse, while atheism, performing on a dark theatre its strange and fearful tragedy, confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank, and sex in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and convulsed all Europe to its centre, that the imperishable memorial of these events might teach the last generations of mankind to consider religion as the pillar of society, the safeguard of nations, the parent of social order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the passions and secure to every one his rights,—to the laborious the reward of their industry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preservation of their honours, and to princes the stability of their thrones. Recollect that the men who by their activity and talents prepared the minds of the people for that great change—Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau, and others—were avowed enemies of revelation; that in all their writings the diffusion of skepticism and revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the Christian priesthood and religious institutions, without once pretending, like other persecutors, to execute the vengeance of God (whose name they never mentioned) upon their enemies; that their

atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment; that the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror; that in the full madness of their career, the highest climax of their horrors, they shut up the temples of God, abolished his worship, and proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep,—as if by pointing to the silence of the sepulchre, and the sleep of the dead, these ferocious barbarians meant to apologize for leaving neither sleep, quiet, nor repose to the living."[34] From all this it is abundantly evident that impiety, when allowed to come into full operation and to exhibit its real character without restraint, is nothing but the agency of the worst passions of man, and the ruin of all social ties and comforts. Hence we are warranted to infer that the spirit of communion with God, or enlightened piety, being of an opposite nature, must lead to opposite effects. Many considerations besides this lead to the same conclusion.

"What can dispose us to a stricter guard upon the purity of our hearts than being members of that society of which Christ, the immaculate Lamb, is the head?"[35] "True devotion calms the passions and improves our love of truth."[36] "Amidst the elevated and benevolent emotions enkindled and kept alive by communion with God, no root of bitterness will be permitted to spring up."[37] "Religion makes men meek and peaceable, and inoffensive in word and deed."[38] "It is the exclusive

---

[34] The Rev. Robert Hall's Works, vol. i. p. 68, also p. 47.

[35] Wilkes's Advice, ed. 8th, p. 58.

[36] Williams's Calvinism, ch. vii. 15.

[37] Malcolm's Help to Family Devotion, p. 2.

[38] Archbishop Tillotson on Matt. vi. 33.

office of religion to check and crush in the very bud those vicious propensities which, if indulged in, and (human laws cannot prevent their indulgence), will at length issue in such deadly offences as alone come under the cognizance of human enactments and the lash of human punishments."[39]

"By prayer, God imparteth strength to subdue bad inclinations, to restrain sensual appetites, to compress irregular passions. It is the only strong bulwark against temptation and sin, and the only sure guard of piety and a good conscience."[40] "It is our chief security in seasons of difficulty and temptation. It is that blessed mean by which correspondence is maintained with God himself, and through which spiritual strength and knowledge may always be derived from heaven, proportioned to our needs."[41] "It is the practice alone of prayer which will gradually calm your mind, which will insensibly banish from it the images of the world and of vanity."[42] Therefore, "as ye would be free from the saddest and darkest temptations, and armed against all temptations, seek and serve the Lord."[43] It is impossible to "obtain the whole armour of God, by any other method, if fervent prayer and supplication in the spirit, under the aids and influences of his grace, be not addressed to the God of heaven, whose work and whose gift this celestial armour is."[44] And this armour is the

---

[39] Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 90.
[40] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.
[41] Bowdler's Tracts, 271, 272.
[42] Massillon on Matt. xv. 22.
[43] Brook's Apples of Gold, ed. 22d, p. 83.
[44] Doddridge on Eph. vi. 18.

only effectual defence against every kind of temptation. Hence prayer, being an essential part of it, or a part without which the rest could not hang together, so as to be of any use, must appear as an indispensable security against all inward inclinations and outward inducements to evil.

"It has been said, 'He who lives well always prays;' and I may add, 'He who acts well prays well.' Every action we perform for the kingdom of God is, in effect, a prayer for the blessing of God. There is a voice in every good thing that is done."[45]

"It is a just and excellent observation, that continuing in prayer will make a man give over sinning, or else continuing in sin will make him give over praying."[46] "There is no man who has ever attempted seriously to ask of God the pardon of his sins, and the sanctifying influence of his Holy Spirit, but must know experimentally that he could not, after such an attempt, proceed with an easy conscience deliberately to do what he knew to be inconsistent with the divine law; and it will be found that multitudes have abandoned even the very form of prayer, because it laid an intolerable restraint upon them in the pursuit of some favourite enjoyment."[47]

Again, to view the subject in another light, "if, upon the first motions towards anger, impatience, uncharitableness, &c., men would, without delay, upon the spot, pray to God and invoke his aid, this would be, upon every

---

[45] Cotton Mather's Essays to do Good, ed. 1825, p. 210.

[46] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 54.

[47] Gordon's Sermons, Dan. ix. 20–23.

incident, an expedient to expel bad thoughts before they had gotten full possession of the heart, by bringing others more worthy into their room."[48] An anecdote of the illustrious Boerhaave, here applicable, has been often quoted, to show the power of devotional habits in controlling the passions and regulating the temper of the mind. "A friend of his, who had often admired his patience under the greatest provocations, asked him by what means he had so entirely suppressed that impetuous, ungovernable passion, anger. The doctor's answer was 'that by daily prayer he had attained that mastery over himself.'"[49]

From all this we see the wisdom of that advice which our Saviour gave to his disciples when he said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;"[50] inasmuch as confirmed habits of devotion have been found, from long experience of their power, to be the best check to all outward and inward tendencies to evil; and from this, again, we see that such habits must be the best security which any one can give for the right discharge of any social duty.

"Religion enforces the natural sense of duty; and hence it is that mankind are generally disposed to place great confidence in the probity of those who seem deeply impressed with religious sentiments. Such persons, they imagine, act under an additional tie, besides those which regulate the conduct of other men."[51] "The ideas of

---

[48] Seed's Sermon on Prov. iv. 23.

[49] Burton's Life of Boerhaave, in Venn's Duty of Man, p. 278.

[50] Matt. xxvi. 41.

[51] Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, vol. i. p. 406.

infidelity and immorality are associated in the public mind, and the association is clear and strong; so much so as to become a ground of action. Whom do men ordinarily choose for umpires, trustees, guardians, and the like? Doubtless they endeavour to select persons of intelligence; but if to this be added Christian principle, is it not of weight in these cases? It is, I believe, seldom known but that a serious intelligent Christian, whose situation in the world renders him conversant with its concerns, will have his hands full of employment. Ask bankers, merchants, tradesmen, and others, who are frequently looking out for persons of probity whom they may place in situations of trust, in whose hands they would choose to confide their property? They might object, and with good reason, to persons whose religion rendered them pert, conceited, and idle; but would they not prefer one who really makes the Bible the rule of his life, to one who professedly rejects it? The common practice in these cases affords a sufficient answer."[52]

The truth is, "The virtues of society, to be kept in a healthful and prosperous condition, must be upheld by the virtues of the sanctuary. Human law may restrain many of the grosser violations; but without religion among the people, justice will never be in extensive operation as a moral principle."[53] "True devotion strengthens our obligations to a holy life, and superadds a new motive to every social and civil duty. Upon an impartial observation of mankind, it will be found that those men who are the most conscientious in the public

---

[52] Fuller's Gospel Witness, p. 65.

[53] Chalmers's Commercial Sermons, p. 141.

and private exercises of divine worship will be most diligent in performing the duties they owe to their neighbour, and in observing the rules of morality."[54] "The most useful men in the Church of Christ have been eminent for piety and a devotional spirit."[55]

"Christianity has raised the tone of moral sentiment, and the standard of moral duty, wherever it has been introduced. Into the great mass of every society that it visits, it carries a leaven of sacred and sanctifying power, which reaches to some who might have been deemed the least capable of being affected by its agency."[56] "It has been found, by frequent trial, of sufficient efficacy to transmute whatever it touches into pure gold, however base and degenerate may have been the subject of this wondrous transformation. He that was before unprofitable and vile becomes both useful and ornamental, a blessing to his immediate connections, and an ornament to Christian society."[57] This even Gibbon owned, when, speaking of the early Christians, he said, "The friends of Christianity may acknowledge, without a blush, that many of the most eminent saints had been, before their baptism, the most abandoned sinners."[58] Hence it has been observed that religion is, "in many respects, apt to promote and advance" our "temporal estate, by engaging us to diligence in our calling, by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful

---

[54] Logan's Sermons, Rom. xii. 11.

[55] Williams's Calvinism, chap. vii. 15.

[56] Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 87.

[57] Morell's History of England, vol. i. p. 270.

[58] Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, edit. 1826, vol. i. p. 283.

endeavours, by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of truth and justice and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid reputation and good esteem among men;" and this "is an unspeakable advantage in business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting instruments of prosperity and success."[59]

The greater, therefore, the number of truly religious persons in society is, just so much the general welfare of society is the more effectually promoted. Even enlightened heathens were "convinced that men would make better members of society if they were religious, than if they were academics,"[60] or irreligious; and therefore they made provision for the diffusion of religious sentiments, according to their views of religion, throughout the mass of the people in their national institutions. On this principle, indeed, all of any observation and judgment must admit that "it is the interest of the magistrate to establish religion, for it is the surest way to obtain the protection of God's providence, without which no wise and prudent writer ever reputed the public affairs of kingdoms to be in a safe and flourishing condition; and it is the only, or by far the best, way, to cultivate those moral principles of duty among a people without which no community can be either happy or secure. Thus Tully thought upon the subject, concluding the happiness of a community to be founded upon religion."[61] Thus, also, thought Washington, the founder

---

[59] Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons, Matt. vi. 33.

[60] Baxter's Inquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul, ed. 2d, vol. ii. p. 77.

[61] Shuckford's Connexions, ed. 2d, vol. ii. pp. 113, 114.

of American independence, "when, in his farewell address to the people of the United States, he acknowledged the necessity of religion to the well-being of a nation," in these words: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."[62] A similar testimony was borne to the importance of true piety by the legislators of our own country, when inquiring into the various kinds of Sabbath-breaking throughout the land. Their words are these: "Your Committee feel assured that an increase of true religion must follow" (meaning, from the measures recommended for securing the proper observance of this day), "inasmuch as that many persons thus favoured with an entire day of rest would be led to employ it for religious purposes, and that a great accession would accrue to the strength and prosperity of the State itself, arising out of the improved tone of morals which a due observance of the Sabbath-day invariably produces. And there are, moreover, abundant grounds, both in the word of God and the history of past ages, to expect that his blessing and favour would accompany such an endeavour to promote the glory due to his holy name and commandment."[63]

Paul was also of the same opinion when he said, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."[64] Godliness, or true religion, keeps a sense of God upon the mind, and makes the rulers rule in the fear of the Lord,

---

[62] Washington's Address, &c., in Fuller's Gospel Witness, p. 97.

[63] Report of a Committee of the House of Commons on the Observance of the Lord's Day, Session 1832.

[64] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

and those over whom they rule be "subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be ready to every good work."[65] It allows none over whom it has sufficient influence, whatever his place in society may be, to be "slothful in business,"[66] but urges him on to "provide things honest in the sight of all men."[67] It assures him that "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel,"[68] and calls upon him to "render to all their dues, to owe no man any thing, but to love"[69] and do him good, and to discharge every duty of life with "a conscience void of offence."[70] Acting under such an influence as this, "religious men are a blessing to their own families, in the different relations of husband, father, and master, as the centre of union to many other families, and to a large and spreading community."[71] Thus it is evident that every man of true piety must, from the very nature of the principles that influence his heart and conduct, be a valuable member of society. The spirit of devotion which guides him is a fermenting spirit. It never can be at rest. But its activity has this peculiarity, that it is invariably directed to the good of the world. It is essential to the nature of him in whom it exercises a controlling power, to be always "about his heavenly Father's business,"[72] always abounding in "labours of love," and "thoroughly furnished unto all good works,"[73]—benefiting society to the utmost extent of the means committed to his trust.

---

[65] Titus iii. 1. [66] Rom. xii. 11. [67] Rom. xii. 17.
[68] 1 Tim. v. 8. [69] Rom. xiii. 7, 8. [70] Acts xxiv. 16.
[71] Dr. Jones's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 17–20. [72] Luke ii. 49.
[73] Heb. vi. 10, and 2 Tim. iii. 17.

Nothing but this spirit of pure and fervent piety has ever been found sufficient to rouse the soul of man from its settled selfishness and keep it in a constant state of well-directed activity. The laws of fashion, honour, and civil government, the checks and excitements of fear, favour, and interest, have all been tried and found wanting. The reason is obvious. All these expedients have been unable to reach the seat of the evil for whose removal they have been employed,—viz., the secret wickedness of the heart. But the spirit of devotion enters the stronghold of the adversary, lays hold of him before he has gathered up and put forth his strength, and thus prevents the pernicious consequences that would arise from delay, and from the use of wrong means, or such as act more distantly and feebly on the conscience and affections.

Hence it is manifest that to individuals, societies, and nations it would be of more advantage, even in temporal things, to cultivate a spirit of devotion, than to trust to any or to all other principles of human action. But how much more important to the welfare of mankind does such a spirit appear when considered in all its relations to their moral, spiritual, and eternal interests! The subjects hardly admit of comparison.

As we have so much need for such a check to internal and external tendencies to evil, and such an excitement to continued faithfulness and firmness in every kind of well-doing, and in every situation, let us learn to "pray without ceasing."

3. Prayer brings support and comfort to the mind in the time of distress, and under all the trials of this life.

"Religious opinions come to our succour in our real

difficulties, and in those which the abuse of our foresight creates;"[74] for "the human mind, formed for religion, soon opens to the reception of ideas which are destined, when corrected and refined, to be the great source of consolation amidst the calamities of life."[75] "The mind that hath any cast towards devotion naturally flees to it in its afflictions."[76] "It is the believer's universal medicine for all the disorders of the soul within, and his invisible shield against every enemy that can attack him from without."[77] "Among the many consolations godly men have under their troubles, this is one, and the chief one," to which they can always flee.[78] "What sweeter lenitive of all those miseries with which mortal life so continually abounds can be invented than this, to pour out all our care and trouble into the bosom of the Almighty, as that of a most faithful friend and affectionate father? Then does the good man lay himself down to sleep with such composure in the midst of waves and storms, when he has lulled all the care and sorrows of his heart to sleep by pouring out his prayer to God."[79] "He that knoweth how to pray may be pressed, but cannot be overwhelmed."[80]

"Prayer is our best resource in the hour of affliction. When every other prop of earthly happiness is withdrawn, and our weakness totters under the pressure of increasing and complicated distresses, this heavenly

---

[74] Necker's Religious Opinions, No. 127, in Br. Test. 55.
[75] Robertson's History of America, 1811, vol. i. p. 357.
[76] Addison, Spectator, No. 163. [77] Horne, Ps. lv. 16, 17.
[78] Archbishop Leighton, Ps. xxxix. 12.
[79] Ibid. Ps. cxxx. 2. [80] Ibid. Ps. iv. 1.

stay is still present with us, still sufficient to sustain us."[81]

"Prayer may be termed the temple of tranquillity to the unhappy, where their minds are soothed and their cares and sorrows are for a time hushed and forgotten. It may justly be said that there only, on this side of the grave, the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."[82] "The causes of the Christian's perturbation and anxiety remain, after his prayers have been presented before God; but the solicitude itself has given place to a divine peace which passeth all understanding."[83]

"When a child is abused abroad in the streets by strangers, he runs with speed to the bosom of his father. There he makes his complaint, and is comforted. In all the hard censures and tongue-persecutions which the saints meet withal in the streets of the world, they may run with their moanings unto their Father, and be comforted."[84] "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."[85] This every experienced believer has often felt. These words of an eminent divine are applicable to every individual who has been accustomed to devotional exercises: "How often have I been delighted in God, when I have found most deceit and darkness in the world! How often has he comforted me, when it was not in man to do it!"[86]

---

[81] Bowdler's Tracts, 1819, p. 273.

[82] Blair's Sermon, Ps. lxv. 2.

[83] Scott's Essays, p. 390.

[84] Owen on Communion, p. 43.

[85] Isa. lxvi. 13.

[86] Baxter's Converse with God in Solitude, in Bickersteth on Prayer, 51.

After all that prayer can do, it must, no doubt, be admitted that "it is a dark hour with us when comforts are put out;" but then prayer strengthens our faith, and hence "comforts us with this, that he who blew out the candle can light up another."[87] It speaks in this manner: "The Lord will renew my comforts after the present sad state I am in, and chase away that trouble and darkness which at present lies upon me."[88] Therefore I will "cast all my care upon him who careth for me,"[89] and "be careful about nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let my requests be made known to God."[90] I know, and am assured, that "he will never leave me nor forsake me,"[91] but will "deliver me when I call upon him;"[92] and "in the day of my trouble he will answer me."[93] Then "why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."[94]

It thus appears that "in the hours of affliction the influence of religion is most beneficial. How glorious a character is it of religion, that it is thus most powerful when its influence is most needed, and when it and the virtues which it has fostered are the only influences that do not desert the miserable and the only influences that can relieve! To the indigent, to the oppressed, to the diseased, while life has still a single sorrow to be borne, it flings on the short twilight a portion of the splen-

---

[87] Ps. xviii. 28. [88] Flavel's Token, ed. 1818, p. 94.
[89] 1 Peter v. 7. [90] Phil. iv. 6. [91] Heb. xiii. 5.
[92] Ps. l. 15. [93] Ps. lxxxvi. 7. [94] Ps. xlii. 5, 11.

dour of that immortality into which it is almost dawning; and when life is closing, it is itself the first joy of that immortality which begins."[95]

We have a fine instance of what religion can do to support and soothe the mind in the midst of the most alarming circumstances, in the history of the burning of the Kent East Indiaman, at sea, in 1825. "Some were enabled, with wonderful self-possession, to offer to others those spiritual consolations which a firm and intelligent trust in the Redeemer of the world appeared at that awful hour to impart to their own breasts. The dignified deportment of two young ladies, in particular, formed a specimen of natural strength of mind, finely modified by Christian feeling, that failed not to attract the notice and admiration of every one who had an opportunity of witnessing it. On the melancholy announcement being made to them that all hope must be relinquished, and that death was rapidly and inevitably approaching, one of them, calmly sinking down on her knees, and clasping her hands together, said, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus,' and immediately proposed to read a portion of the Scriptures to those around her; and her sister, with nearly equal composure and collectedness of mind, selected the 46th and other appropriate Psalms, which were accordingly read, with intervals of prayer, by those ladies alternately, to the assembled females." And the feelings of many others in that trying situation, in which six hundred and forty-one human beings were crowded together in a ship of thirteen hundred and fifty tons, may be judged of from the following letter which was

[95] Brown's Philosophy, ed. 6th, p. 674.

written, when all hope was given over, "by an officer on board, enclosed in a bottle, and thrown into the sea," and about seven months afterwards found at a great distance from the place where it was committed to the deep: "The ship Kent is on fire. Elizabeth, Johanna, and myself commit our spirits into the hands of our blessed Redeemer: his grace enables us to be quite composed in the awful prospect of entering into eternity."[96] Many other instances of the power of piety, in human extremities, to strengthen and comfort the soul, might be quoted. But let this suffice.

"Hold fast, therefore, by this sheet-anchor of happiness, religion. You will often want it in the times of most danger, the storms and tempests of life."[97] "As the best consolation in trouble, continue earnest in prayer, although your prayers be not immediately answered."[98] "Is any among you afflicted," said the apostle, "let him pray."[99]

The efficacy of prayer in times of trial, when the mind is ready to be overwhelmed with sadness and despondency, being thus so evident, both on inspired and uninspired authority, every one who is in want of comfort should certainly have recourse to it as his surest and most availing resource. When so many expedients are daily but unsuccessfully tried to lessen the woes of life and sustain us amidst the afflictions of our state, is it not amazing infatuation that the help of prayer is not more

---

[96] Loss of the Kent East Indiaman, pp. 18, 114.

[97] Earl of Chatham's Letters to his Nephew, p. 25, in Br. Test. p. 70.

[98] Macknight, Rom. xii. 12.

[99] James v. 13.

frequently called in, and more reliance placed on its soothing and animating power? Let none in affliction neglect this easy and powerful remedy, which God has given to all the sons and daughters of sorrow who may think fit to use it.

4. In the very exercise of prayer there is a pleasure, an actual enjoyment of the purest happiness known in this life.

"The *summum bonum*," or chief good, "which is only able to make thee happy, as well in thy death as in thy life, is the true knowledge and worship of thy Creator and Redeemer, without which all other things are vain and miserable."[100] "The reason man grows sick and weary of every object, and engages in such a multitude of pursuits, is because he still retains the idea of his lost happiness,—which, not finding within himself, he seeks it through the whole circle of external things, but always seeks without success, because it is, indeed, to be found not in ourselves, nor in the creature, but in God alone."[101]

"We know, and, what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the source of all good and of all comfort."[102] Even Lord Rochester "often confessed that, whether religion was true or not, he thought those who were persuaded of its truth, and lived so that they had quiet in their conscience, and believed God governed the world, and acquiesced in his providence, and had the hope of endless blessedness in another state, were the

---

[100] Lord Burleigh's Advice to his Son, in Brewster's Testimonies, pp. 67, 68.

[101] M. Pascal's Thoughts, p. 203, in ibid. p. 101.

[102] Burke's Works, vol. iii. p. 128; Br. Test. p. 77.

happiest men in the world. The whole system of religion, if believed, he admitted, was a more secure foundation of happiness than any other."[103]

"Connecting every object and event with God, as either appointing or permitting, the devout mind has unfeigned pleasure in the divine will."[104] "The pleasure of a religious man is an easy and portable pleasure, such an one as he carries about in his bosom, without alarming either the eye or envy of the world. A man putting all his pleasures into this one is like a traveller putting all his goods into one jewel. The value is the same, and the convenience greater."[105] "The man who lives under an habitual sense of the divine presence keeps up a perpetual cheerfulness of temper, and enjoys every moment the satisfaction of thinking himself in company with his dearest and best friends."[106]

"By prayer we obtain true peace of mind. This peace is a calm and entire resting upon God for the supply of every necessity of body and soul for time and for eternity."[107] Prayer itself has hence been termed "the peace of our spirit, the stillness of our thoughts, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempest."[108]

"It is the practice alone of prayer which will gradually calm your mind, which will insensibly banish from it the images of the world and of vanity, and which will

---

[103] Lord Rochester, in Crichton's Converts, vol. i. pp. 42, 43.

[104] Williams's Calvinism, chap. vii. 15.

[105] Tatler, No. 211.

[106] Spectator, No. 93.

[107] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 15.

[108] Bishop Jeremy Taylor, in Christian Observer, 1818.

disperse all the clouds that produce all the disgusts and wanderings of your prayers."[109]

"By this expedient your peace and felicity are increased, as we are already admitted to nearer fellowship with God, and have our natures more and more assimilated to his divine image."[110] "The true happiness of every Christian does properly exist in his communion with God. Prayer is, then, a necessary part of the Christian's happiness; for it brings him into the presence of God, and is the most direct act of communion with him."[111] "The devout believer is the only truly happy man. What a delightful life does he live whose prayers afford him constant communion with God! No fears and anxieties about future things need distract him, nor present difficulties and burdens weigh him down. He may calmly, steadily, and cheerfully pass through all the varieties of this life, living in the most exalted and yet endearing friendship with his Maker, having a constant support, and a hidden but solid joy, from intercourse with him."[112] Plato's opinion was a correct one when he said, "Our ultimate end consists in being made like unto God, as far as the human nature is capable."[113] There can be no doubt, indeed, that "the highest state of man consists in his purity as a moral being, and in the habitual culture and full operation of those principles by which he looks forth to other scenes and other times. Among these are desires and longings which nought in earthly science can satisfy, which soar beyond the sphere

---

109 Massillon on Matt. xv. 22.

110 Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 40.

111 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 11. 112 Ibid. p. 18.

113 Plato, in the Lives of the Ancient Philosophers, p. 178.

of sensible things, and find no object worthy of their capacities, until, in humble adoration, they rest in the contemplation of God."[114] "Serenity of mind and gladness of heart still attend a devout mind, when it maintains an intercourse with the great author of its being. When we are in company with our God, with our Redeemer, with our dearest and best friend, our hearts burn with love, exult with gratitude, swell with hope, and triumph in the consciousness of that presence which everywhere surrounds us; or else we pour out our fears, our troubles, or our dangers to the great supporter of our existence."[115] "Can any thing be more pleasant than to retire from the hurry of a vain world, that without reserve we may pour out our hearts and lay open the secret desires of our souls in the presence of that Great Being whose nature disposeth him to pity us, and whose power enables him to bestow upon us, in the fullest and most effectual manner, every blessing that can promote our most important interest?"[116]

"In the midst of all our dejections and tumultuous thoughts, it will be a means to induce a quietness and serenity of mind, if a man can but pour out his soul and lay open his case before God. By this means he may have a continual supply of comfort upon every occasion, besides those special raptures and elevations of spirit which men that are much conversant in this duty, and inquisitive after this gift, shall sometimes be affected with."[117] "Prayer is intended to be not only the ease of our hearts, by casting our burden upon God, as it was

---

[114] Abercrombie on the Intellectual Powers, p. 429.
[115] Wilkes's Advice, p. 69. [116] Walker's Serm., Ex. xx. 8.
[117] Bishop Wilkins, pp. 23, 24.

to Hannah, who, when she had prayed, went her way and ate, and her countenance was no more sad, but to be the joy of our hearts, by putting the promises in suit and improving our acquaintance with heaven." [118]

"If piety did not excite sublime emotions, who would sacrifice even sensual pleasures, however vulgar they might be, to the cold dignity of reason?" [119] "When the soul rises above this little orb, and pours its adorations at the throne of celestial majesty, the holy fervour which it feels is itself a rapturous delight." [120] "There are seasons of devotion, both public and secret,

> When men's souls,
> Snatch'd by the spirit's power from their cells
> Of fleshly thraldom, feel themselves upborne
> On plumes of ecstasy, and boldly spring
> Up to the porch of heaven." [121]

Hence the enjoyments of true devotion have been termed "a heaven upon earth." [122]

> "Without breathing, man as well might hope
> For life, as without piety for peace.
> A soul in commerce with her God is heaven,
> Feels not the tumults and the shocks of life,
> The whirls of passion and the strokes of heart." [123]

Piety is a "stream whose fountain never fails, which has no sediment at bottom, and which runs forever, unmingled with the waters of bitterness. There is not a disposition of the mind," indeed, "which is attended

---

[118] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, p. 70.
[119] De Stael's Germany, 3, 209; Br. Test. p. 29.
[120] V. Knox's Essays, 90. [121] Venn's Duty, pp. 294, 295.
[122] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, 1819, p. 50.
[123] Young's Night Thoughts, Compl. Night 8.

with greater pleasure than piety;" and it "is adapted to the notions of happiness and chief good which all men entertain."[124] Nay, we have the authority of inspiration for asserting that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."[125] The Saviour himself has further said, "Be of good cheer;"[126] "peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you;"[127] "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."[128]

Surely, then, so simple, efficacious, and ever ready a means of happiness should never be neglected by any one, especially by those who are continually seeking after worldly pleasure, and asking, like their brethren in the Psalmist's days, "Who will show us any good?"[129] The Psalmist himself answers the question: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased."[130]

All are in search of happiness in their several ways, but none finds it who does not seek it in God's appointed way, in the pure and undefiled religion of the gospel. In the ways of the world it cannot be met with. But in the true and living way of access to the Father of mercies it never can be missed.

And this way is open to all who are willing to walk in it. Come, then, to Christ, all ye who are seeking rest to your souls. Devote yourselves to him in the

---

[124] Logan's Serm., Rom. xii. 11; also, Cecil's Remains, ed. 8th, p. 332.

[125] Prov. iii. 17. [126] John xvi. 33. [127] John xiv. 27.

[128] John xvi. 22. [129] Ps. iv. 6.

[130] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 5.

duties of godliness, and his Spirit will give you peace and rejoicing.

5. In prayer, we acquire and exercise those dispositions of the mind without which we cannot, but with which we will, be prepared for the happiness of heaven.

"We know that none go to heaven but men of prayer."[131] "In eternity, those who in this world neglect to pray will experience nothing which is in itself good, but will find that, as they refused to ask here, God will refuse to give forever."[132] "Where is it taught, within the whole compass of the Bible, that the prayerless sinner shall be saved? That you need not supplicate one of the blessings of redemption, and yet be as sure of obtaining them all as if you had? That pardon has ever been procured, or that heaven has ever been reached, by a single individual who has not sincerely felt and cordially put forth the desire for them? There is no such thing taught in the Bible: the very contrary of this is what the Bible uniformly maintains and inculcates."[133] "Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy society between him and us: we could neither delight ourselves in God, nor he take pleasure in us. In the very nature of the thing, it is a necessary qualification for the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, who, to us, is the cause and fountain of happiness."[134] But, without the spirit of prayer, this likeness to God can never be acquired; for God is holy, and there is no holiness among his creatures

---

131 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 5.

132 Dwight's Theology, Serm. 139.

133 Thomson's Lectures, Ps. v. 1–8.

134 Archbishop Tillotson, Heb. v. 9.

on earth but that which accompanies true prayer. All the blessings of the heavenly state—therefore, every thing included in salvation—must be withheld from the prayerless. "Salvation is promised solely to prayer; salvation is not attainable but through the aid of prayer; salvation is granted only to perseverance in prayer. Consequently, every life which places an insurmountable obstacle in the way of prayer can have no pretensions to salvation."[135] And yet who is there that has no pretensions of this kind? Every one, except he who is sunk in despair, or in utter apathy about his eternal state, pretends to think himself safe, whatever mode of life he may be observing, and pretends also that he believes his salvation to be the most important of all concerns, and hence entitled to the greatest attention. It is universally admitted, indeed, that "the salvation of our souls is needful as a necessary end, and the practice of true religion needful as subservient to that end. If to escape eternal misery and to obtain eternal happiness be not necessary, I know not what can make any thing necessary. And if this cannot be done without the knowledge and practice of true religion, that is as necessary as the salvation of our souls is."[136]

"What, let me ask you, is the great and ultimate end of all true religion? Is it not to lift you above this world? Is it not to elevate your ambition to the better world which lies beyond it? And is it not to prepare you for its noble employment and its exalted happiness, by detaching your affections from terrestrial things, and

---

[135] Massillon, Matt. xv. 22.

[136] Bishop Sherlock on Death, ed. 17th, p. 170.

teaching you, even while on earth, to have your conversation in heaven?"[137] It is in this way that the soul acquires a habit of converse with God, a likeness and love to him, and a fitness to participate in the blessings of salvation and the exercises of angels. "It approaches to the borders of an invisible world, and acts as a spirit holding intercourse with the Father of Spirits. It drops, for a time, the remembrance of its earthly connections, to dwell among everlasting objects. Prayer, by this means, both composes and purifies the heart, and gives the soul its proper elevation towards God."[138] "The man who devoutly engages in religious worship advances in spirit to the very brink of time, and leaves this world, with all its cares and joys, behind, to hold communion with the things and persons of an eternal state."[139] "Such intercourse with God is the best preparation for a heavenly state."[140] "The great, glorious, and delightful character on which" the worshipper "so frequently dwells is, in a sense, enstamped on his heart, and always realized and enjoyed." Hence he becomes, "continually, a better man in all the relations of the present life, and a more and more proper candidate for immortal happiness in the world to come."[141] "God is not a stranger to him; he has long known him; his Saviour is his tried and constant friend. And just as a man who has been continually experiencing the bounty and goodness of a friend whom he has never seen, will rejoice

---

137 Thomson on Infidelity, p. 164.
138 Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.
139 Jones's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 17–20.
140 Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 6.
141 Dwight's Theology, Serm. 140.

in beholding his face, so will it be to the devout believer, who has 'fellowship with the Father and the Son Jesus Christ.'"[142]

When we are enabled, in spirit and in truth, "to give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, it is not only a heaven upon earth, but it is a pledge and earnest of a heaven in heaven too; for if we be here 'every day blessing God,'[143] we shall be praising him forever; and thus all that shall go to heaven hereafter begin their heaven now."[144] This is to be "spiritually minded, which is life and peace here,"[145] and "the earnest and beginning of eternal life" hereafter.[146]

However unable we may be to understand, and however unwilling others may be to acknowledge, all this in the present sinful state, yet a time is coming when all shall see it, and none can doubt it or deny it. "To those who seek the Lord," in all the duties of true devotion, "the day of judgment will be a day of redemption, vindication, coronation, when the Lord will pay them for all the prayers they have made."[147] Those who now fervently and constantly "pray to the Father who is in secret shall then be rewarded openly."[148] Therefore, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint."[149]

From all these evidences it appears that without prayer man is unfit for heaven, and cannot be admitted into it;

---

[142] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 17. [143] Ps. cxlv. 2.
[144] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, ed. 1819, p. 50.
[145] Rom. viii. 6.
[146] Colquhoun on Spiritual Comfort, ed. 1813, p. 332.
[147] Brooks's Apples of Gold, ed. 22d, p. 91.
[148] Matt. vi. 6. [149] Luke xviii. 1.

that prayer is indispensably necessary to purify and spiritualize our minds, so as to give our souls a likeness to God's holy nature and a love to his holy will and presence, without which we could have no taste nor capacity for the society and enjoyments of heaven.

How awful, then, is the delusion of the prayerless, who are as much at ease about their state as if they were not living in a way that unfitted them for salvation! Though they feel no satisfaction in God's work and the society of God's people here, and studiously neglect the one and shun the other as disagreeable, yet how seldom does it occur to them, far less alarm their fears, that in this state of mind they have a sure proof of their unfitness for the far more spiritualized services and holier company of the angels of God in heaven! "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."[150]

Let every one try himself by this test, and let it bring those who are far off near to God, and those who are near to him nearer still.

6. Finally, to sum up all the benefits of prayer in one general proposition, it is by means of it, and it alone, that God's blessings are conveyed and made effectual blessings to us. "With piety begins all good on earth."[151] "By the very act of praying aright, we are made to possess many of the blessings which we ask."[152] "It is an effectual instrument working in us all good. It is the channel by which God conveyeth spiritual light into our minds and spiritual vigour into our hearts."[153]

---

[150] Heb. xii. 14.

[151] Young's Night Thoughts, Compl. Night 8.

[152] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 8.

[153] Barrow on the Lord's Prayer.

"Prayer is a duty of such absolute necessity that no blessing can be obtained without it."[154] It is the "indispensable means of obtaining mercy and grace,"[155] and every benefit included therein or connected therewith. "Without prayer, vain will be to you all the provisions that are made in the gospel for your deliverance and happiness."[156] "We have no title to look for any blessing from God except through its instrumentality."[157] "Prayer is the avenue to all good, temporal and eternal, and, to us, the only avenue. He who will not pray, therefore, shuts up the only passage which has been opened for him by God to the attainment of happiness. It may be alleged here, but it will be alleged to no purpose, that multitudes who do not pray are as prosperous as those who do. An ox is pampered, but it is only for the slaughter. The enjoyments of this life are never blessings to him that does not pray. If they are merely means of luxury, hardness of heart, and grossness of life, he who enjoys them will only treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. On the part of God, indeed, they are always kindly given; but on the part of the recipient they are regularly abused, by being made incentives to sin. They are, therefore, curses to him, by his own perversion, and are styled blessings only by an abuse of language."[158] In this sense it was that God said to the prayerless priests of old,[159] "If ye will not

---

[154] Hele's Devotion, pref. p. 7.
[155] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 265.
[156] Thomson's Lectures on Psalms, Ps. v. 7, 8.
[157] Thomson's Posthum. Serm., Jas. v. 13.
[158] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 142.
[159] Mal. i. 6.

lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."[160]

But this is not the true worshipper's case. However few of this world's advantages may have fallen to his lot, he has received God's favour with them, and thereby they have become real blessings; and in what regards his soul, every thing has been made to work for his good. In this point of view, the efficacy of prayer, as an instrument of conveyance, has never been disputed by any competent judge. "God would have it to be the key by which all the treasures of heaven should be opened;"[161] for

> "Prayer ardent opens heaven,
> Lets down a stream of glory on the consecrated hour
> Of man in audience with the Deity."[162]

It is "the channel through which our best blessings come. It is the medium of communication between the great Head of the church and its various members.

> Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
> Prayer makes the Christian armour bright.
> And Satan trembles when he sees
> The meanest saint upon his knees."[163]

"When Satan seeth that a Christian improves temptation so much for his own advantage as to make it an errand to go to God, then he desists and gives over to contend."[164] But "the efficacy of prayer lies not in

---

[160] Mal. ii. 2. [161] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.
[162] Young's Night Thoughts, Compl. Night 8.
[163] Thornton's Advice, pp. 108, 109.
[164] Gray's Sermons on the Spiritual Warfare, ed. 1832, p. 17.

working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourselves, in begetting or improving right dispositions of heart, and thereby making us fit subjects of the divine mercy. Hence prayer has been appointed by God as an instrument for improving our nature, and is required, on our part, as a condition of receiving his favours."[165] These favours may not come at the time, and in the way, and to the extent, we may wish. But they will come as infinite wisdom may direct for our good.

When "offered with frequency and constancy, with sincerity and zeal, prayer always turns to good account, and never wants good effect,—which, if it be not always discernible, is yet certainly real; if it be not perfect as we may desire, is yet competent as expediency requireth, or as the condition of things will bear."[166] As "it is a circumstance of frequent recurrence in worldly affairs, that a person in the pursuit of some desirable object, which he fails to secure, unexpectedly attains some other object of far greater importance," so, in our most earnest prayers, we may not literally obtain what we ask, but we may obtain something of much more value. "The cripple who at the gate of the temple asked alms from Peter and John did not obtain money, but very different relief;"[167] and so may we, if we pray aright to the Giver of all blessings.

"Prayer duly performed, our Lord assures us, shall not fail to draw down a blessing on the worshipper. You may not, indeed, receive every particular blessing

---

[165] Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.

[166] Barrow, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

[167] Gisborne's Natural Theology, ed. 3d, pp. 254, 255.

for which you pray, because, though good in itself, it may not be suitable to your present condition. You may not receive even what is granted in the very way and form that you expected, because that may not be conformable to the peculiar purposes of the Most High; and you may not receive any answer to your most unexceptionable petitions so soon as you desired, because you may not yet be duly prepared to receive them. But a blessing, of some kind or other, you shall infallibly receive every time that you rightly pray to God. You shall never seek his face in vain, or go empty from his presence."[168] "Your prayers may be answered though the thing prayed for be withheld; yea, or though it should be given for a little while and snatched away from you again. There are four ways of God's answering prayers:[169] by giving the thing prayed for immediately;[170] or by suspending the answer for a time and giving it afterwards;[171] or by withholding that mercy which you ask from him, and giving you a much better mercy in the room of it;[172] or by giving you patience to bear the loss and want of it."[173] In one or more of these ways, "the Christian who has been frequent, fervent, and particular in his supplications for a length of time has doubtless found that many of his petitions (defective and defiled as he knows them to be) have been manifestly answered, both in his own temporal and

---

168 Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vii. 3.

169 Dan. ix. 23.

170 Luke xviii. 7.

171 Deut. iii. 24–27, xxxiv. 4, 5.

172 2 Cor. xii. 9.

173 Flavel's Token to Mourners, p. 131, ed. 1824.

spiritual concerns, and in behalf of others, often beyond his expectations and contrary to apparent probability."[174]

Hence it is evident that true prayer is sure to receive an answer in some way or other; that it is the medium through which God conveys all his blessings to his people; and that there can be really no blessings where prayer is wanting, however apparently great and numerous may be the outward advantages which the prayerless possess. Such advantages can only be so many snares and temptations to unsanctified souls, to increase their guilt and complete their ruin; whereas, to those who live by prayer, every thing works for good.

Surely this consideration should induce every reasonable person to pray for a blessing on all the gifts of God's bounty and grace.

---

[174] Scott's Essays, p. 389.

CHAPTER III.

FOR WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY?

It has already been observed that "prayer is taken for the address of a creature on earth to God in heaven, about every thing that concerns his God, his neighbour, or himself, in this world or the world to come."[1] The variety of subjects, therefore, on which prayers may be offered up to God, is infinite, and cannot be particularly pointed out. All that can here be suggested can amount to nothing more than a few general directions, applicable to all Christian worshippers.

One thing is evident; and that is, that "prayer is to be made for things lawful"[2] only. "The things which we may ask in our prayers are all those which are agreeable to the will of God."[3] "We may pray for every thing suitable to the divine will and conformable to our calling,—for good things spiritual and temporal, the former absolutely, but the latter only conditionally."[4] In the form of prayer which our Lord himself delivered to us, we are taught to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."[5] This "petition is, both by reason

---

[1] Watt's Guide to Prayer, quoted p. 1.
[2] Confession of Faith, chap. xxi. 4.
[3] Limborchi Theo. lib. v. chap. xxvi. sec. 22.
[4] Pictteti Theo. lib. xi. chap. vi. sec. 8.
[5] Matt. vi. 10.

and revelation, confined to things which are agreeable to the will of God. His will involves whatever is right and good; and nothing which is not agreeable to it is in reality desirable."[6] To illustrate what is here required, we have also Christ's own example in Gethsemane, when he said, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."[7]

It is only when our prayers are regulated by this rule that they can be heard; for the apostle tells us that "this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."[8] It would be the greatest absurdity, indeed, to think that God should grant any prayer at variance with his own will. His will must be our guide in every petition which we offer up to him: otherwise, we shall pray in vain.

But this "commandment is exceeding broad."[9] It extends to all parts of a man's wants and wishes. In applying it to particulars, much must be left to the judgment of the worshipper himself, and his knowledge of the peculiarities of his own situation. There are certain evils, however, which are common to all, and certain benefits which all require; and these should be subjects of prayer to every one, as well as the more private circumstances of his state. Deliverance from ignorance, guilt, and the slavery of sin, and the obtaining of a sanctified state of mind, and all good in time and eternity which infinite wisdom may see fit for us, are subjects in

---

[6] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 139.
[7] Matt. xxvi. 39.
[8] 1 John v. 14.
[9] Ps. cxix. 96.

which all are concerned, and regarding which all ought to pray to God, both in their own behalf and that of others.

1. The first thing we should pray for is the gift of the Holy Ghost, that by his teaching we may know what we want, and what God requires of us. "Our first petition should be that the Lord would graciously give us his Holy Spirit, to teach and enable us to pray"[10] for things agreeable to his will.

Our minds are so full of darkness, and so much alienated from God by nature, that, till his Spirit work effectually within us, we have no adequate conception of our own sinful and indigent state, of what God would have us to do, and of the way in which we should approach him. We have no proper sense of our wants, and no inclination to pray for the supply of them in the right way. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought;"[11] for "we cannot order our speech, by reason of darkness."[12] We are so ignorant of the nature of things that often, when we pray, we "know not what we ask,"[13] whether it may be good for us or not; and frequently we "receive not, because we ask amiss;"[14] and, till we are enlightened from above, it must be so; for "the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."[15] "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"[16]

All who have seriously endeavoured to lead a holy life are so sensible of these truths that "a necessity for the agency of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and re-

[10] Scott's Essays, p. 392.
[11] Rom. viii. 26.
[12] Job xxxvii. 19.
[13] Matt. xx. 22.
[14] James iv. 3.
[15] 1 Cor. ii. 11.
[16] Rom. xi. 34.

generate the mind"[17] is one of their deepest convictions. Nay, "there is hardly any one thing of which mankind may be made more sensible, from their own experience, than the necessity of divine aids. The wisest among the heathen writers, guided only by the light of nature, acknowledged the necessity of supernatural aids, and taught that nothing great or good could be performed without the influence of a Divine Spirit."[18] "The higher kind of philosophy among the ancient heathens fully affirmed the doctrine of divine influence, and distinctly recommended devotion."[19] "Homer frequently expresses the influence of his deities on the human mind, by the term 'inspired.'"[20]

In the prophetical and supernatural sense of the word, no sober worshippers of God expect or seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But in his ordinary secret influences on the soul, all must seek and obtain some measure of his inspiration before they can feel their wants and pray aright.

"As the needy only can stoop to ask the relief of an alms, so then only can we begin to pray when we feel ourselves necessitous creatures, when we long to receive of God what we beg of him, knowing that without the gift of it we must be miserable."[21] "The nature of prayer supposes that we have a just sense of our wants and miseries, and our dependence on God for relief."[22]

---

[17] Dr. Alexander's Introduction to Advice to a Young Christian, p. 1.

[18] Logan's Sermons, Luke xi. 13.

[19] Sheppard's Thoughts, Note A, p. 290.

[20] Parkhurst רוח; Iliad, b. x. 482; xv. 262, &c.

[21] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 259.

[22] Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.

"A real, deep, and abiding sense of our indigence is the first spring of a true and earnest desire to obtain help from God.[23] While we think we can help ourselves, and get through our difficulties by our own means, we are little disposed to pray to God."[24] Hence appears the necessity of assistance from the Holy Spirit. "Sense of want is the spring of desire. Without this sense given by the Holy Ghost, there is neither desire nor prayer. He reveals to us our wants, that we may reveal them to him"[25] again. "No teachings under those of the Spirit of God are able to make our souls acquainted with their own wants, burdens, temptations. For a soul to know its wants, its infirmities, is a heavenly discovery."[26] It is by the Spirit that "the eyes of our understanding are enlightened,"[27] and from him that, in our prayers, we receive "the preparations of the heart and the answers of the tongue;"[28] for he "knoweth and searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,"[29] and "helpeth our infirmities,"[30] and enableth us "to cry, Abba, Father." It is therefore evident that "if ever thy soul get above the earth and get acquainted with the heavenly life, the Spirit of God must be to thee as the chariot of Elijah, yea, the very living principle by which thou must move and ascend;"[31] for "it is the Spirit of God that opens and expands the mind, animates and renovates the heart, helps our infirmities, and gives us strength to resist the tempter, to mortify the flesh, and overcome the world."[32]

---

[23] Ps. lxx. 5.
[24] Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 6, 30.
[25] Owen on Communion, p. 138.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Eph. i. 18.
[28] Prov. xvi. 1.
[29] 1 Cor. ii. 10.
[30] Rom. viii. 15, 26.
[31] Baxter's Saints' Rest, ed. 1825, p. 200.
[32] Thornton's Advice, p. 109.

"God, by his Spirit moving on the face of the waters, made the world, according to the word of his power; and by his Spirit moving in the souls of his people, even when they are a perfect chaos, he creates the fruit of the lips;"[33] and therefore the Spirit's "agency in the spiritual world is, in Scripture, represented to us by that of the air in the natural world."[34] "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit;"[35] that is, all true worshippers, of whom there are many that have experienced the most unequivocal evidences of this inward operation of grace. "There are pious persons, of very poor attainments in other respects, without learning or human acquirements, in the very lowest stations of life, who, asking for the aid of the Holy Spirit, can, with the greatest propriety of expression, the deepest reverence, and an uninterrupted fluency of words, pour out their souls to God and edify their families and their neighbours."[36] This "is the singular gift of God, and certainly very precious."[37] It "is not of us, but the free gift of God." But "he is most ready to impart it to those that heartily pray for it."[38] "If ye, being evil," said our Saviour, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"[39] Here "the faithfulness of God is pledged that he will give the

---

[33] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, p. 66.

[34] Parkhurst on רוּחַ.

[35] John iii. 8.

[36] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 36.

[37] Archbishop Leighton's Rules for a Holy Life, sec. 1, rule 1.

[38] Frank's Nicodemus, ed. 1823, p. 88.

[39] Luke xi. 13.

Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Easier terms surely never were proposed for the attainment of any blessing;"[40] and greater encouragement never was given to present a request. "The grace of the Holy Spirit, therefore, must be sought for with unwearied supplications."[41] "It is necessary for every one to apply himself to God, in earnest prayer that he would be pleased graciously to vouchsafe unto him his Holy Spirit."[42] Let us ask then, that we may receive, and be enabled to know ourselves and God's will, and pray aright.

"Come, Holy Spirit, calm my mind,
And fit me to approach my God;
Remove each vain, each worldly thought,
And lead me to thy blest abode."[43]

2. We should pray for the pardon of our sins through, or on account of, the atonement made by our Saviour for the guilt of men.

Sin is the radical evil of our nature, from which all our fears and griefs, and other ills of life, arise. A sense of guilt is a burden to our souls, and fills us with awful apprehensions at the idea of appearing before him against whom we have sinned. It withers our best blessings, and makes us look upon our best friend as our enemy. This is well expressed in these words: "So long as I view God shrouded in the darkness of frowning majesty, I can place in him no trust, and I can bear towards him no filial tenderness. The helpless necessity under which I labour, so long as the question of my guilt remains unsettled, is to dread the being whom I am commanded

[40] Bowdler's Tracts, p. 253.
[41] Piscator on Acts i. 14.
[42] Frank's Nicodemus, p. 88.
[43] Anon.

to love." But "when I think of Christ, and think of him as one who has poured out his soul unto the death for me, I feel a confidence in drawing near to God."[44]

These expressions describe both the guilty and the pardoned state of our souls; for "*without* Jesus Christ, man is of necessity to be considered as lying in vice and misery; *with* Jesus Christ, man appears as released from vice and redeemed from misery. *In* him consists all our happiness and all our virtue, our life and light, our hope and assurance; *out* of him there is no prospect but of sins and miseries, of darkness and despair,—nothing to be beheld by us but obscurity and confusion in the divine nature and in their own."[45]

The reason of this is that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;"[46] and "there is no salvation in any other"[47] but Jesus Christ; for "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved." "The best man on earth can scarce be said to pass a day without violating the divine law in thought, word, and deed." And yet "revelation declares that man may expect, on certain conditions, not only pardon, but everlasting happiness; not on account of his own merit, which in the sight of God is nothing, but on account of the infinite merits of the Redeemer, who, descending from the height of glory, voluntarily underwent the punishment due to sin, and thus obtained those high privileges for as many as should comply with the terms announced by him to mankind."[48] "That he suf-

[44] Chalmers's Serm. 1819, Acts xxvi. 18.

[45] Pascal's Thoughts, p. 149, in Br. Test. p. 227.

[46] Rom. iii. 23. [47] Acts iv. 12.

[48] Beattie's Elements of Moral Science, 2, p. 27, Br. Test. pp. 224, 225.

fered and died as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings and deny that it is there may with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome."[49] Therefore, "as to the doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ, it appears that he has done all for us that one being can do for another."[50]

If we be once convinced of our guilty state, and of the certainty of obtaining pardon provided we earnestly seek it where we are told that it is to be found, we cannot hesitate about the necessity of praying for it. "The soul that is sensible of her pollution, fears she can never be sufficiently purified from it, and, therefore, prays yet again and again continually for more abundant grace to make and keep her holy."[51] "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins."[52] "God be merciful to me a sinner."[53] "The consciousness of those sins which we daily commit draws forth from us humble confessions and supplications" like these, "in the presence of him who 'is faithful and just to forgive[54] our sins;'"[55] "disclaiming any goodness or righteousness in ourselves, and flying to the alone merits of Christ and the free grace of God, in and through him"[56]

---

[49] Soame Jenyns's Works, 4, p. 20, Br. Test. p. 226.
[50] Hartley's Observations on Man, 2, p. 357, in Br. Test. 226.
[51] Horne, Ps. li. 3. [52] Ps. li. 2.
[53] Luke xviii. 13. [54] 1 John i. 9.
[55] Principal Hill's Lectures, b. v. chap. 5, sec. 3.
[56] Poole on Luke xviii. 13.

alone. "The pardon of our sins is the effect of God's highest favour, of that love which is peculiar to his children; 'tis the fruit of our Saviour's bloody sufferings; without it we are miserable forever; and can we expect to obtain it by a formal, superficial prayer? It deserves the flower and zeal of our affections. How solicitous and vehement and unsatisfied should we be, till we have the clear testimony that we are in a state of divine favour!"[57] "God's pardoning us is not a transient act, but continued, as conversation is a continued creation. And if our constant sins of imperfection and frailty make this at all times needful, then surely ought the sense of especial and peculiar guilt to constrain and stimulate us into proportionally earnest supplication."[58] "Christ, who hath left us a pattern of prayer, hath thereby taught us forever to implore and beg the forgiveness of our sins; that, as we, through the frailty of our nature, are always subject unto sin, so we should always exercise the acts of repentance, and forever seek the favour of God!"[59]

At all times, then, but especially "when we have fallen by the power of temptation, and our wounds are bleeding afresh, when we are mourning under a sense of our sins, and begin to fear lest fresh guilt should awaken fresh wrath, let us fly to the righteousness of Christ, and make it the ground of our hope, fix our eye upon it, carry it with us to a throne of grace, and urge it as our only, as it is our all-availing, plea for mercy."[60] Let us "prostrate ourselves before our Father in heaven, beg-

[57] Bates, in Sheppard's Thoughts, 160; Ps. cxxxii. 4, 5.

[58] Sheppard's Thoughts, p. 159.

[59] Bishop Pearson on the Creed, art. 10.

[60] Rawlin on Justification, 1797, p. 277.

ging of Him who knows our heart, with all its frailties, that he would accept our sincere repentance, and pardon our errors, for the sake of Jesus Christ." [61]

This is the obvious conclusion to which all these testimonies lead us. If it so evidently appears that sin is the cause of all our fears and griefs and miseries,—that we can never have peace with God and our own minds while it remains unpardoned,—that a method of pardon has been graciously provided in Christ's blood,—and that there is a certainty of obtaining pardon if we earnestly and constantly seek it in that way,—then surely we must see both the necessity and the advantage of making the forgiveness of our sins the subject of our most anxious supplications. There is nothing that more deeply concerns us, both in time and in eternity, than to be freed from our sins, and nothing, therefore, for which we should pray with more earnestness and anxiety. Let our prayers then, correspond with the vast importance of the subject.

3. We should pray for success and progress in every thing good, that we may be prepared to enter into a happier state when our days here come to an end. This includes every thing comprehended in the general term *sanctification*,—every spiritual grace imparted to the people of God, and every Christian duty required from them, in the present state of their being. It is a continuation of that heavenly impulse which is given to all the powers and affections of the soul, when the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, renews our wills, and

---

[61] Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.

persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ," as he is "offered to us in the gospel."[62] It is a constant progress in knowledge, faith, repentance, hope, love, joy, and every branch of new obedience, and hence called "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness."[63] "There is not one conceivable transaction, amongst all the manifold varieties of human employment, which it is not fitted to animate by its spirit. There is nothing that meets us too homely to be beyond the reach of obtaining from its influence the stamp of something celestial. It offers to take the whole man under its ascendency, and to subordinate all his movements; nor does it hold the place which rightly belongs to it till it be vested with a presiding authority over the entire system of human affairs."[64] Hence Scripture urges it upon us in such expressions as these: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to thè glory of God."[65] "Follow all righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."[66] "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."[67]

"Hallowed be thy name, is the first petition or request which we are directed to make; and its being placed before the rest may be intended to teach us that we should make it a chief object, in all our desires and endeavours, to exalt and to honour our Father in heaven."[68] Accordingly, we are elsewhere commanded "to seek first

---

[62] Shorter Catechism, Quest. 31. [63] Ibid. Quest. 35.
[64] Chalmers's Com. Serm., 1820, Rom. xiv. 18.
[65] 1 Cor. x. 31. [66] 1 Tim. vi. 11. [67] Eph. iv. 24.
[68] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 9.

the kingdom of God and his righteousness."[69] Therefore, "blessings of a spiritual and eternal nature must make up the principal subject-matter of the prayer of Christians;" such as "more knowledge of the Lord that bought them, more dependence upon his name, pardon of their sins through his blood, mortification of their vile affections through his Spirit, and a more perfect conformity to his example."[70]

It is necessary to pray for these parts of the Christian character, because they can be wrought in us solely by divine grace. "Sanctification is the reformation of man. But who can remould man, unless He who first moulded him? Wherefore the apostle says, 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly.'[71] He does not say, May God assist and promote your sanctification; but ascribes it entirely to God. He first puts into and bestows upon us the Spirit of holiness, by whose impulse we are guided and begin to act aright. Wherefore let us pray to God that he may sanctify us."[72] "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned."[73]

But "in asking for spiritual blessings, for repentance, faith, humility, holiness, love, &c., we are sure of having the particular request granted; for 'this is the will of God, even your sanctification.'"[74][75] The invitation to ask and the assurance of success run in these and similar terms: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."[76] "Let him that is athirst come; and who-

---

[69] Matt. vi. 33.
[70] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 263.
[71] 1 Thess. v. 23.
[72] Zanchius on 1 Thess. v. 23.
[73] Jer. xxxi. 18.
[74] 1 Thess. iv. 3.
[75] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 100.
[76] Isa. lv. 1.

soever will, let him take of the water of life freely"[77] "Ask, and it shall be given unto you."[78] "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not be faint,"[79] "going on from strength to strength, till every one of them in Zion appear before him,"[80] "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."[81]

Hence we should derive encouragement to "continue in prayer and childlike communion with God; for by this the mind of a man becomes sanctified, and is best guarded from all wanderings and vain excursions, and inspired with true love of meekness towards men."[82] We should "seek a well-regulated, sober spirit, and entertain no care at all, but such as" we may "put into God's hands, such as he will take off" our "hands and undertake for us."[83] The example of the pious Brainerd ought to be the object of our daily imitation. "I spent," said he, "my first waking minutes in prayer for sanctification, that my soul might be washed from its exceeding pollution and defilements."[84] We should particularly "make it a subject of prayer every morning, that we may be enabled to seize with wisdom every opportunity of doing good that may offer through the day,"[85] and that, for this purpose, we may not be led "into temptations under which we may succumb or be oppressed,[86] but may be delivered

[77] Rev. xxii. 17.
[78] Matt. vii. 7.
[79] Isa. xl. 31.
[80] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.
[81] James i. 4.
[82] Frank's Nicodemus, p. 107.
[83] Archbishop Leighton on 1 Pet. v. 7.
[84] Edwards's Life of Brainerd, 1749, p. 118.
[85] Mrs. Huntington's Memoirs, 22d Jan. 1819.
[86] Peter Martyr, 2 Kings v. 11.

from them when God permits them to come upon us, and be enabled to glorify him in our[87] escape."[88]

We should pray the more earnestly for all this, because it is only when our sanctification is thus carried on and completed, by the grace of God, that we can be prepared for the happiness of another world. "A soul destitute of holiness is in no capacity, either of faith or sight, to see the Lord. It can have no union to, or communion with, or fruition of God in Christ, in grace, or in glory. But with holiness it may see and enjoy him"[89] throughout eternity. "The state of bliss we call heaven will not be capable of affecting those minds which are not qualified for it. We must in this world gain a relish of truth and virtue, if we would be able to taste that knowledge and perfection which are to make us happy in the next. The seeds of those spiritual joys and raptures which are to rise up and flourish in the soul to all eternity must be planted in her during her present state."[90] "The Scriptures place our ultimate happiness in singing praises to God and the Lamb, in becoming one with God and members of Christ and of each other; which phrases have a remarkable agreement with the deductions from reason; and we seem authorized to conclude from both together, that the future happiness of the blessed will consist in contemplating, adoring, and loving God, in obeying his commands, and, by so doing, ministering to the happiness of others, rejoicing in it, and being made partakers of it."[91] But how can this be, if the soul be

[87] Matt. vi. 13.

[88] 1 Cor. x. 13.

[89] Continuators of Poole on Heb. xii. 14.

[90] Spectator, No. 447.

[91] Hartley's Observations on Man, 2, 397, in Brewster's Testimonies, 52.

not sanctified or ripened in all the graces of the gospel which prepare it for this state of things? As the work must be begun here, then, and as part of that work is prayer, and the rest of the work cannot go on without prayer, it is hence very evident that we should make all these considerations subjects of earnest prayer.

From these various testimonies, then, it appears that we should pray for every thing that can help us to overcome the power of sin, live a holy life, grow in all goodness, and be ready to enter on the enjoyment of eternal happiness when we depart from our present state of being. This is just as necessary as to pray for a knowledge of sin and the pardon of sin. We need as much to be delivered from the dominion and evil effects of sin as from the guilt and defilement of sin. Unless holy affections and a fitness to enjoy God's heavenly presence were wrought in our souls, conviction and forgiveness of sin could avail us but little. It was to accomplish this end that the whole Christian system was designed. This we are expressly taught in these words: "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teacheth us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[92] Let us, then, anxiously pray that every thing in life may be rendered instrumental in advancing our spiritual improvement and fitting us for the happiness of heaven.

---

[92] Tit. ii. 11–14.

4. We should pray for such a measure of the advantages of this life as may enable us to be useful in our station, and that whatever God gives us he may keep us from abusing it, and be pleased to turn it to his own glory, to our good, and to the benefit of those connected with us.

If our desires after the good things of this life be not regulated by such considerations as these, and followed up by a corresponding moderation and heavenly-mindedness in our practice, every thing which the bounty of our great Benefactor bestows upon us may become the means of increasing our guilt and our misery. It is true that "worldly prosperity is the object of our earnest wish and of our earnest prayers: yet this blessing may become a curse, if we provoke the displeasure of Him who gave it. It is a curse, of which we must one day feel all the bitterness, if it withdraw our thoughts and our desires from the concerns of eternity."[93] For this we have the unerring word of God himself, where he says, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."[94] Many instances of the fulfilment of this threatening, every man of observing and reflecting habits can mention, as either having taken place, or as now actually taking place, in society around him. He knows well that many of those who are rich make their riches their God and the means of sinning and of rendering themselves miserable, and that "they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and

---

[93] Dr. Brunton's Serm. Mal. ii. 2. [94] Mal. ii. 2.

into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."[95]

But though the advantages of worldly prosperity, when abused, thus render us more criminal and wretched, yet, when employed in the way which infinite wisdom and goodness designed, they may become the means of much good. A reasonable measure of them is, indeed, promised for that purpose, in these words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;"[96] and "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come."[97] "The enjoyments of this life are never blessings to him who does not pray."[98] But when they fall into the possession of him whose spirit has been sanctified by the power of the truth as it is in Jesus, they become real benefits both to himself and to all within the range of his influence.

Of this we have an instance in the history of Job, who "delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. He was a father to the poor, and the cause which he knew not he searched out. And he brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth."[99]

Many other instances of the same kind, though now either overlooked or but little regarded among men, will

---

[95] 1 Tim. vi. 9. [96] Matt. vi. 33.
[97] 1 Tim. iv. 8. [98] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 142.
[99] Job xxix. 12, 13, 15–17.

be brought to light and rewarded at the last day; for the Judge has already told us that all will then be dealt with according to the way in which they have used or abused his gifts, and that the sentence of those who have devoted them to godly and benevolent purposes will be this: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."[100]

To obtain worldly benefits, and turn them to uses like these, and then receive such a reward for so doing, are real blessings, for which every one ought to pray, and pray earnestly too. But still, so far as any thing temporal is an object of our desires, we must only ask what God may see fit to grant. "To wish and pray for the advantages of life is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath so far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would give us our daily bread; that is, as his words have been always understood, that he would bestow what is necessary for the sustenance and comfort of life. Yet the very sound of the words retrenches every superfluous and extravagant wish. Not for riches and honours, for great advancement, or long life, or for numerous and flourishing families, has he given us any encouragement to pray. Foreign are such things to the real improve-

[100] Matt. xxv. 34, &c.

ment, foreign, very often, to the true happiness, of man. Foolishly they may be wished for, when the wish accomplished would prove our ruin. Let health and peace, contentment and tranquillity, bound the humble prayer which we send up to heaven,—that God may feed us with food convenient for us, that, whatever our outward circumstances are, they may be blessed to us by him, and accompanied with a quiet mind."[101]

"Give us this day our daily bread, is a petition which it well becomes both poor and rich to offer unto God. The poor of this world, who depend upon daily labour or daily alms for their subsistence, do evidently need the concurrence of God's providence to favour their industry and to supply them with the necessaries of life. But the rich also equally depend upon the will of God for the continuance of what they possess, and equally need his blessing to render their abundance effectual for their comfort."[102]

"In asking for temporal blessings, it will ever become us not to seek great things for ourselves,[103] but to say, with our Saviour, 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.' The prayer of Agur is a suitable prayer for us:[104] 'Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.'"[105]

"We may ask ease when we are racked with pain,

---

[101] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.

[102] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 11.

[103] Jer. xlv. 5. [104] Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

[105] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 79.

health when taken off from our employment by languishing sickness, or maintenance when we are left destitute. We may ask the continuance of our lives, and those of our dearest relations, when sick or in danger of death. For each of these benefits prayer may be made to God; because instances of each kind are recorded in Scripture; because, by prayer for them, God is exalted as the Sovereign Lord both of life and all its comforts, our dependence on him as such is confirmed, and our gratitude towards him increased. But, though we may pray for any of these benefits, we must always do it with entire submission to the will of God, whether he sees best to give, to continue, or to remove them."[106] We must do it "with this condition, that they tend to the glory of God and our own good; which reminds us of the saying of the ancient poet in Plato's Alcibiades: 'Give us, Most High King, the things that are good, whether we ask them or not; but withhold from us evil things, even when we ask them.'"[107]

This also reminds us of other instances of a similar kind among the ancient heathens. "The Lacedemonians never used, either in their public or private devotions, to make any other request than that the gods would grant what is honourable and good for them,[108] as Plato witnesseth.[109] But Plutarch tells us they added one petition more, viz., that they might be able to suffer injuries.[110] The Athenians used, in their public prayers,

---

106 Venn's Duty of Man, p. 262.

107 Picteti Theo. lib. xi. cap. 6, sec. 8.

108 Potter's Antiquities of Greece, b. ii. c. 5.

109 Plato, in Alcib. 11, in ibid.

110 Plutarch, in Institut. Laconic. in ibid.

to desire prosperity for themselves and the Chians." One of the famous golden verses of Pythagoras was to this effect:

> "Then to your work, having pray'd heaven to send,
> On what you undertake, a happy end."[111]

Paul's advice to the converts of Philippi breathes the same spirit of moderation: "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God;"[112] and to Timothy: "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."[113] This, then, should be the boundary of our longings after this world's goods.

But, if it should seem fit to God to number us among "them that are rich in this world,"[114] then our prayer should be that he would enable us, "not to be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; to do good, and to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate" of our abundance to those who have been less favoured than we by the bounty of Heaven. Whatever the infinitely wise and gracious Disposer of all things may be pleased to give us, we should pray that he may direct us in the right use of it, and make us do all to his glory.

The same spirit of regard to the divine will should bound and regulate our petitions concerning our station,

---

[111] Lives of Ancient Philosophers, 1702, p. 340.
[112] Phil. iv. 6. [113] 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8.
[114] 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

reputation, influence, usefulness, and other advantages in society, and also our health, strength, talents, mental and professional acquirements, our connections in life, and the length of our days, and the time and manner of our removal into another world.

It thus appears that we may make every worldly thing that concerns us a subject of prayer, provided we ask nothing at variance with God's will, and keep all temporal considerations subordinate to those which are eternal; "for every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."[115]

5. We should pray for all the foregoing blessings to others, that the glory of God may thereby be the more extensively promoted. Whatever good thing, whether temporal or eternal, we pray for to ourselves, the same we should also pray for to others, varying our petitions only so far as to suit the varied circumstances of those for whom we intercede, and in this respect, as in all others, doing as we would be done by.

"Intercessions for the welfare of others form a material part of prayer. The sincere worshipper is not to consider himself as a single separate being, confining his concern wholly to himself."[116] "We are to pray, in general, for all men. Our prayers are one of the greatest and best expressions of our charity, and therefore ought to be as large and as extensive as our charity is."[117] "*Our Father* is the language of numbers,—of a family or of a

---

[115] 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. [116] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.
[117] Archbishop Tillotson's Serm., 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

congregation; not of an individual. Similar phraseology runs also through the whole form" of the Lord's Prayer, and shows us "that we are to pray for others. The three first petitions" particularly "are employed as prayers for others." [118] "I exhort," said Paul, "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men." [119]

"Prayer is to be made for *all sorts of men* living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death." [120] "If a man see a brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and God shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it." [121] "We should pray for all, except for him who sins unto death, if we can know him; not only for friends, but for enemies. But it is absurd to pray for the dead; because no precept for such prayers exists; because we have no example of prayers of this sort in the holy writings; and because we can obtain nothing for the dead, nothing for the godly in a state of salvation, nothing for the ungodly irrevocably shut out from salvation." [121]

But, to be more particular, we should pray for *our civil rulers.* The divine command is for "kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty." [123] A similar command was given to the Jews when in a state of cap-

---

[118] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 144.
[119] 1 Tim. ii. 1.
[120] Confession of Faith, ch. 21, 4.
[121] 1 John v. 16.
[122] Picteti Theo., b. xi. c. 6, sec. 6, 7.
[123] 1 Tim. ii. 2.

tivity in Babylon: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace."[124] "God save the King,"[125] was also a prayer which was in common use among that people long before that period. Long afterwards, too, when their country had become subject to the Roman yoke, as "Josephus tells us, twice a day they offered up sacrifices for the life and safety of the emperor."[126]

Acting on the same authority, all the early Christians who lived under the emperors, both before and after these princes became converted to Christianity, made it a part of their devotional exercises to pray for them. Polycarp, who succeeded the Apostle John in the pastoral charge of the Church at Smyrna, about the beginning of the second century, when writing to the Christians at Philippi, directed them particularly to "pray for kings, magistrates, and princes."[127] Tertullian, about the beginning of the third century, when he presented his second apology for the Christians, stated the general practice of the church, when he said, "We always pray for all the emperors, that they may have a long life, a secure reign, a safe family, valiant armies, a faithful senate, a loyal people, a quiet world, and whatever are the wishes of the man or the Cæsar."[128] Lactantius, who flourished about the end of the third century and the early part of the fourth, when addressing the head

---

[124] Jer. xxix. 7. [125] 1 Sam. x. 24 and 2 Sam. xvi. 16.

[126] Archb. Tillotson, quoting Josephus in Serm. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

[127] Polycarp, in Cave's Lives of the Apostles, ed. 3d, p. 129.

[128] Tertullian's 2d Apology, ch. 30, in Barrow's Serm. on 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

of the state, said, "We supplicate God, with daily prayers, that he would first of all keep thee, whom he hath willed to be the keeper of affairs; then that he would inspire unto thee a will whereby thou mayest ever persevere in the love of God's name, which is salutary to all, both to thee for thy happiness and to us for our quiet."[129] Chrysostom, in the fifth century, also said, "This all communicants know, how it came to pass every day, both in the morning and evening, how we offer up prayer for the whole world, for kings, and all in authority."[130]

Throughout all Christian churches, from those times to the present day, the same practice has prevailed. "Under his own superintendence, God employs subordinate rulers, civil magistrates, who, whatever names they assume, fulfil the substantial duties of the kingly office, and who, whatever form of government they may adopt, are recognized in the New Testament as approved rulers, to whose commands conscientious obedience is enjoined, and for whose success appropriate prayers should be offered."[131] We have, therefore, both divine and human authority for this duty.

We should also pray for our *spiritual guides and teachers.* "Brethren," said the Apostle Paul, "pray for us;"[132] meaning himself and his fellow-labourers in the office of the apostleship. "Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;"[133] "praying that utterance

---

[129] Lactantius 7, 36 in ibid.

[130] Chrysostom on 1 Tim. ii. 1, in Tillotson's Serm. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

[131] Macindoe's Application of Scripture to Political Government, p. 276.

[132] 1 Thess. v. 25. [133] Rom. xv. 30.

may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel."[134] If an inspired messenger of God desired such support from his less gifted brethren, how much more do ordinary instructors stand in need of the earnest prayers of all believers! "People should pray for and pay all regard to, those that labour among them in word and doctrine. They should take heed of despising or neglecting their holy ministrations, and of stifling the light and impressions of the Spirit that attend them."[135] "Remember always to pray for your minister, that God would put some divine message into his mouth, which might leave a heavenly relish on your spirit;"[136] and "esteem him highly for his work's sake."[137] It is always a bad sign of a man's piety and the state of his heart when he feels no respect for the ministers of religion, and has no anxiety about their success and usefulness. It invariably shows that he has not a true love to God and religion; otherwise he would do what he could, in secret prayer and open support and encouragement, to strengthen and animate them in their Maker's work. But the reverse holds true when any one takes every opportunity in his power to implore a blessing on the labours of God's servants, to show them public respect and honour, and to assist them in every religious measure which is likely to glorify their divine Master and benefit his people. By such means religion is made to grow within us. God gives us a return of grace in our bosoms for the good that we wish for his cause; and in the honour that we show him, through our bene-

---

[134] Eph. vi. 11, 19. [135] Guyse, in Hinton on Prayer, p. 5.
[136] Baxter's Saint's Rest, p. 197. [137] 1 Thess. v. 13.

volent feelings and kind offices towards his servants, we find that we ourselves reap honour and profit from him. Christ says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it to me," and "Whosoever honoureth him that is sent honoureth him that hath sent him." Prayer for his servants, therefore, should never be neglected by any one who wishes to become wise unto salvation.

We should, further, pray for *all true believers*, and that their number may be increased, by the spread of the gospel, wherever its power is not felt. "Our prayers should be not only for ourselves and our own necessities, but also for others, especially for the holy brethren, that is, the church."[138] The prayer of Paul was, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;"[139] and his advice was, "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith,"[140]—an advice which includes both the feeling and the fruit of prayer, the benevolence of the heart and the beneficence of the hand. This concern for the interests of believers was strongly felt by all the apostles and early Christians, who were all so actuated by the spirit of brotherhood as to be tenderly affected for each other's welfare. We have some moving instances of this spirit in distinguished witnesses to the truth, in the second century. Polycarp, when in the hands of his persecutors, "heartily recommended to God the state of the catholic church throughout the world."[141] So did Ignatius in

---

[138] Zanchius on Eph. vi. 18.

[139] Eph. vi. 24. [140] Gal. vi. 10.

[141] Cave's Lives of the Fathers: Polycarp.

similar circumstances;[142] and "Justin Martyr continually prayed for and promoted the good of souls."[143]

With such feelings, which have been more or less experienced by every true believer, it is impossible not to desire the *extension of the Christian faith over all lands, and the setting up of its power in all hearts.* "If you feel for the perishing condition of sinners, you will commend them, with tears, to the mercy of your God."[144] In this spirit the Psalmist prayed when using these words: "Have respect unto the covenant, O God; for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause."[145] It was the command of our Saviour to "pray the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest;"[146] and his inspired apostle called upon all to "pray that the work of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified."[147] "When we pray for the kingdom of God to come, and for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we pray that the time may very soon come when the true God shall be rightly worshipped through all the world, and his holy law be kept pure and unbroken among us as it is kept in heaven."[148] This is a state of things for which all ought earnestly to pray. They ought to have "great longings for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, especially by the conversion of the heathen to God, and the Jews his ancient people."[149]

---

[142] Cave's Lives of the Fathers: Ignatius.
[143] Ibid.: Justin Martyr.
[144] Advice to a Young Christian, p. 64.
[145] Ps. lxxiv. 20–22. [146] Matt. ix. 38. [147] 2 Thess. iii. 1.
[148] Mrs. Sherwood on the Catechism, Lord's Prayer.
[149] Edwards's Life of Brainerd. 1749, p. 124.

We should pray in an especial manner for our *friends*. "We ought to remember our benefactors before God, and pray for a return of divine blessings on their head."[150] "Pray one for another,"[151] said the Apostle James. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," said the Psalmist. "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces; for my brethren and companions' sake, I will say, Peace be within thee."[152] It is said that a late eminent divine "devoted two hours every Friday to peculiar intercession with God for his friends."[153] Polycarp, in the prayer above mentioned, earnestly "recommended to God the cause of all his friends and acquaintances, whether great or little, honourable or ignoble."[154] All good men have made the welfare of their relatives, benefactors, and well-wishers the subjects of ardent prayer. We cannot have true affection to those with whom we stand connected by these ties, nor be possessed of good feeling, if we do not pray for them. It is our duty to have them often upon our hearts at God's throne; for "though there be no reason why God should save our children, relations, or friends, before others, yet there is a reason why we should seek their salvation, because they are particularly put under our care or stand in connection with us."[155] We should, therefore, pray for "our brethren and kinsmen according

---

[150] Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.
[151] James v. 16.
[152] Ps. cxxii. 6–9.
[153] Romaine, in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 86.
[154] Cave's Lives of the Fathers: Polycarp.
[155] Fuller, in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 84.

to the flesh,"[156] for "the dear and interesting circle of parents, brothers, sisters, wife, children, servants, Christian friends, neighbours, and connections,"[157] and say, with the Psalmist, "With thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed forever."[158] Our Saviour's prayer in the 17th chapter of the Gospel by John also teaches the same lesson.

Still further, "*our enemies* themselves ought not to be forgotten in our prayers."[159] "The duty of praying for any with whom we may unfortunately, from whatever cause, be at enmity, is very important. It prepares us to receive ill treatment in a right spirit; to be very slow to suspect others of designing an injury; and, when their design is evident, it disposes us to return good for evil."[160] It is also an essential part of Christian obedience; for our Saviour has expressly commanded us to "pray for them that despitefully use and persecute"[161] us; and this command he fortified by his own example, when he prayed on the cross for those who reviled and murdered him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[162] Stephen, the first martyr for the cause of the gospel, finished his course with a similar expression of benevolence towards his persecutors. He "kneeled down and cried, with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."[163] During the ten memorable persecutions which afflicted the church in the course of the first three hundred years after Christ's death,

---

156 Rom. ix. 3.
157 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 84.
158 2 Sam. vii. 29.
159 Blair on Ps. lxv. 2.
160 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 85.
161 Matt. v. 44.
162 Luke xxiii. 34.
163 Acts vii. 60.

many instances of the same kind took place. Justin Martyr may be taken as one out of multitudes that might be enumerated. He prayed for "the fiercest enemies of the Christians. From none did he and his religion receive more bitter affronts and oppositions than from the Jews: yet he tells Tryphon that they heartily prayed for them and all other persecutors."[164] Many bright examples of this description, too, might be gathered from the histories of the various persecutions which have been carried on against the witnesses of Jesus, both in our own and other countries. Of this we need only refer to one example, that of John Huss, the Bohemian reformer. When condemned by the council of Constance in 1415, his prayer for his enemies was, "O my God, let that mercy of thine, which no tongue can express, prevail with thee not to avenge my wrongs."[165] The greatest and best men, indeed, in every Christian country, have prayed for their enemies, and therein have left us an example which we ought to follow.

Finally, we should pray for *those who are labouring under any kind of trouble.* "The distressed and afflicted ought to share our sympathy, remembering them who suffer adversity as being ourselves in the body, and shedding the friendly tear at the thought of human woe. In fine, our prayers ought to be an exercise of extensive benevolence of heart,—a solemn testimony, offered up to the God of love, of our kind and charitable affection to all men."[166] "Are any afflicted, in mind, body, or estate?

---

[164] Cave's Lives of the Fathers: Justin Martyr.
[165] Fox's Book of Martyrs, 1824, p. 173.
[166] Blair on Ps. lxv. 2.

We should weep with them that weep,[167] and pray that the chastening, however grievous now, may yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby;[168] that they may find God a present help in time of trouble;[169] and that their affliction may work out for them"[170] "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."[171] "Is any among you afflicted?" said James: "let him pray. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick."[172] For every one, then, whom we know to be in any kind of distress, it is our duty to pray. It is an exercise of Christian feeling, of brotherly tenderness and sympathy, which all have a right to expect from God's people.

In short, the apostle's prayer for Philemon and the church in his house is one which we ought to use in behalf of all men, in whatever circumstances they may be placed: "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ;"[173] for in this "he prays for the favour of God and Christ, and all prosperity to them, which the Hebrews were accustomed to call by the name of peace."[174] This comprehends deliverance from all evil, restoration to God's favour, and all holiness and happiness in time and in eternity; and these are blessings which we ought to pray for to others as we wish for them to ourselves. Being all brethren, either by nature or grace, we should feel for each other as

---

167 Rom. xii. 15. 168 Heb. xii. 11. 169 Ps. xlvi. 1.
170 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 85. 171 2 Cor. iv. 17.
172 James v. 13–15. 173 Philemon, verse 3.
174 Grotius on Philemon, verse 3.

brethren, and pray for brethren's blessings to one another. But, in doing so, we should not forget to pray, also, for them that prosper in the world and are at ease, and have often much more need for our prayers than others have,—that they be kept from temptation, and from abusing their blessings, and that they may be blessed indeed, and made a blessing to others.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

It has been already stated, that we are at liberty to pray for nothing but what is agreeable to God's will. The same rule is applicable to this part of the subject. The spirit or temper of mind in which we offer up our prayers must be such as God requires of them that worship him; otherwise our devotions cannot be acceptable to him. What he requires, in this respect, is clearly revealed in his word; and from it we learn the following particulars:—

1. We should pray with deep humility of mind.

"The great mistake of prayer is, not praying as destitute creatures, but thinking that we are, and have already in some good degree, what we pray for."[1] "I can expect no good from my prayers till I know what I am, and not pray above my state, or think more highly of it and of myself than I ought to think."[2] "It is evident, from the very nature of the thing, that in as far as regards the believer himself, prayer is just the putting forth of a desire which he has no power to gratify; that the more ardent this desire becomes the more conscious does he become of his utter incapacity to compass the

---

[1] Adams's Private Thoughts, ed. 1821, p. 252.

[2] Ibid. p. 254.

object of his desire, and that in looking, therefore, to the divine will, and longing to have his own brought into accordance with it on the subject with which his soul is engrossed, he does most emphatically express his absolute dependence on God."[3]

"The proud look down upon the earth, and see nothing that creeps upon its surface more noble than themselves. The humble look upward to their God,"[4] and feel that "it is a dreadful thing for dust to speak to God Almighty, and a dangerous thing to speak to him as slightly and regardlessly as if we were talking to one of our companions."[5] In how self-debasing a spirit did Abraham say, "Behold, now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes;"[6] and Job, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth;"[7] and the Psalmist, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"[8] and the publican, who, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."[9]

"Humility and modesty" are required in prayer, because this is an address to God. This, "the consideration of the supreme majesty of the Deity," on the one hand, "excites in us; because he is the Most High, who

---

[3] Gordon's Sermons, Dan. xi. 20–23.
[4] Brown's Philosophy, ed. 6th, p. 418.
[5] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, p. 92.
[6] Gen. xviii. 27.
[7] Job xl. 4.
[8] Ps. viii. 3, 4.
[9] Luke xviii. 13.

has heaven for his throne and the earth for his footstool,[10] before whose majesty the seraphim veil their faces; and, on the other hand,"[11] the consideration "of our vileness, who are but dust and ashes. Above all, we are sinners, in which state nothing can be more abject in the presence of God, since it renders us unworthy of his favour. This humility arising from the consciousness of sins has its peculiar residence in the heart, which the Lord remarkably demonstrates in the example of the Pharisee and Publican, the words of whom are held forth as agreeing with the state of each of their minds, in which the one glories over his perfection, and the other bewails his sins with the greatest debasement of mind. And thus James commands:[12] 'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.'"[13] "We must pray under a sense of our guilt and of our depravity, as well as of our weakness and wants. We must pray with self-debasing sentiments, conscious that we are not worthy to lift up our eyes to God, much less to receive from him pardon, peace, and salvation."[14] "No disposition is more essentially necessary to a Christian, at all times, than humility, but more especially when he makes an approach to God in his worship. 'All those things hath mine hand made, saith the Lord, but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.'"[15] And, indeed, how can we consider the nature of that God whom we worship, and our own sinful and miserable state, without being struck

---

[10] Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. [11] Ibid. vi. 2. [12] James, iv. 10.
[13] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sec. 8.
[14] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 270. [15] Isa. lxvi. 2.

with a sense of the necessity of deep humility and self-abasement, in our intercourse with him? It is particularly to be noticed that self-abasement, and even self-abhorrence, is the immediate effect of a sense of the divine presence.[16] "Let us endeavour, therefore, to be truly and inwardly humble. Let us remember the grace of redemption, what guilty criminals we were before unmerited mercy and sovereign love found out a way to our recovery."[17]

But we cannot be humble without confessing our sins to Him in whose sight the self-justifying sinner never can be accepted. We ought "to confess our sins the oftener in prayer, that, thus being continually mindful of our unworthiness, we may humble ourselves before God."[18] When he requires us to do this, "it is not for his sake, but for ours, that he does it, that our sins may become known, not to him, but to us, and thus, having been made known to us, we may be displeased with their vileness, may detest them, and ask forgiveness of them, and, when asked, obtain it."[19] "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[20] In this exercise of self-debasement, we ought to make "an humble confession of the meanness of our nature, our distance from God as we are creatures, our subjection to him, and our constant dependence on him; of our sins, both original, which belong to our nature, and actual, that have been found in the course of our lives; of our desert of punish-

---

[16] Isa. vi. 1–5. [17] Witherspoon's Serm., Ex. xxxiii. 18.
[18] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sec. 8.
[19] Zanchius on 1 John i. 9. [20] 1 John i. 9.

ment and our unworthiness of mercy, arising from the sense that we have of all our aggravated sins, and of our wants and sorrows of every kind."[21]

Further, to pray with true humility, we must renounce our own wills and be entirely resigned to the divine will. "A sense of religion, where it is sincere, will necessarily be attended with a complete resignation of our own will to that of the Deity, as it teaches us to regard every event, even the most afflicting, as calculated to promote beneficent purposes which we are unable to comprehend, and to promote, finally, the perfection and happiness of our nature."[22] "I know no duty in religion more generally agreed on, nor more justly required by God Almighty, than a perfect submission to his will in all things; nor do I think any disposition of mind can either please him more, or become us better, than that of being satisfied with all he gives and contented with all he takes away. None, I am sure, can be of more honour to God, nor of more ease to ourselves; for if we consider him as our Maker, we cannot contend with him; if as our Father, we ought not to distrust him."[23] The duty of humble submission to God's will in every devotional act is well urged by the imitator of the heathen satirist, where he says,—

> "Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
> But leave to heaven the measure and the choice;
> Safe in his power whose eye discerns afar
> The secret ambush of a specious prayer;

---

[21] Dr. Watts on Prayer, ed. 8th, pp. 8, 10.

[22] Stuart's Outlines of Moral Philosophy, ed. 4th, p. 241.

[23] Sir William Temple's Works, vol. ii. p. 97.

Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best." [24]

"Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done," [25] is the feeling which should regulate every prayer that we offer up to the infinitely great and good Disposer of the various events of our lives.

In all our approaches, then, to God, let us address him under deep feelings of self-abasement, confessing our sins, resigning ourselves entirely to his will, and, as it were, "annihilating ourselves before him in the contemplation of our own worthlessness, and of his transcendent excellency and perfection." [26] Let us remember that, in coming to him, we must come as the poor and the needy, the guilty, condemned, and miserable, to receive from him whatever he is willing to bestow on us, as his free and unmerited gift, without the slightest consideration whatever of any thing good on our part, of which we have none but what he has wrought in us; for without this self-renouncing state of mind our prayers cannot be accepted.

2. We should pray with faith.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." [27] "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him:" [28] "and this is the confidence that we have in him,

---

[24] Dr. Johnson's Imitation of Juvenal's 10th Satire.

[25] Luke xxii. 42.

[26] Hutcheson's Introduction to Moral Philosophy, b. i. chap. 4.

[27] Heb. xi. 6.

[28] 1 John iii. 21, 22.

that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."[29] The very nature of "prayer imports that we have a prevailing persuasion and hope, notwithstanding our sinfulness and helpless misery, that the Lord is ready to bestow eternal blessings on all who apply for them in the way of his appointment."[30] "When we ask, we must not fluctuate between hope and despondency, but assure ourselves that we shall be as certainly succoured, and as certainly enriched by all that our souls need, as if the power and the blessedness we implore, were already in our possession."[31]

But it is only through the name, merits, and mediation of Christ that we can "have this boldness and access with confidence"[32] towards God in our devotions. "No man cometh unto the Father but by him,"[33] who "ever liveth to make intercession for us,"[34] and who himself hath said to all true worshippers, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you;"[35] for, "all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."[36]

Hence it has been justly said, "It is evidently to be understood that your prayers are offered with a firm faith or belief that your heavenly Father is able to bestow what you request, and that he is willing to hear your prayers when presented in the name of Christ."[37] "If

---

29 1 John v. 14, 15.
30 Scott's Essays, p. 331.
31 Venn's Duty, p. 271.
32 Eph. iii. 12.
33 John xiv. 6.
34 Heb. vii. 25.
35 John xvi. 23.
36 Matt. xxi. 22.
37 Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vii. 7.

you would succeed in your suits to heaven, you must present them with a firm dependence on Christ, and on the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God to perform his promises, without staggering at them through unbelief."[38]

"Faith is required, not only general faith in Christ, which is the mother of piety, but also particular faith, which is a confidence of being heard, or of obtaining that which is asked. This James requires:[39] 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.'"[40] "We must pray with the persuasion that we shall be accepted of God in Christ, that the thing which we pray for is good, and that we shall obtain it, if it make for the glory of God and our salvation, and, at the same time, with confidence in God's promises."[41]

Our faith may often be weak, and it may seldom rise to a strong, unhesitating assurance. But if it be truly founded in Christ and nourished by his Spirit, however feeble and faltering it may frequently be, we ought not to despond, or be afraid that our devotions will not be accepted; for "the want of full assurance as to our personal interests in the blessings of the gospel cannot be thought to frustrate prayer."[42] The success of prayer rests on a better security than any imperfect attainments of ours. "The Bible tells us that our best works are filthy rags, and that our prayers cannot be accepted but

[38] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 211.
[39] Jas. i. 6, 7.
[40] Limborchi Theo., b. v. c. 27, sec. 4.
[41] Picteti Theo., b. xi. c. 6, sec. 9.
[42] Sheppard's Thoughts, p. 239.

through the merits of our Redeemer,"[43] even when our faith and other graces have reached the utmost point of improvement to which they can attain in this life. "Our prayers, like all other works, are unclean. They cannot, therefore, come into the presence of the Lord, that is, to be heard, unless they are first cleansed. But Christ alone can cleanse them with his own blood,"[44] whose merits are the "incense that" is offered "with the prayers of all saints."[45] All, therefore, must "look to Christ as him who bears the iniquity of their holy things; who adds incense to their prayers, and makes them acceptable to God."[46]

Our faith, whether strong or weak, must, consequently, rely on the sufficiency of Christ to render our devotions well pleasing to the Father; or, which is the same thing, our prayers must all be offered up "in the name of the Lord Jesus."[47] This "is so necessary a requisite, that to omit it is a capital offence in the sight of God,"[48] who commands us to "honour the Son even as we honour the Father."[49] "Prayer is nothing worth unless it be presented in Christ's name, and in faith, relying on Christ's promise to hear and answer."[50] We must "pray in his name, and in no other name but his only; partly because our sinfulness and alienation from God are so great that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator,[51] and partly because there is none, in heaven or earth, appointed to or fit for that glorious

---

[43] Mrs. Sherwood on the Catechism; the Lord's Prayer.
[44] Zanchius on 1 John ii. 1.
[45] Rev. viii. 3.
[46] Owen on Communion, p. 172.
[47] Col. iii. 17.
[48] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 273.
[49] John v. 23.
[50] Romaine's Life of Faith, p. 98.
[51] Isa. lix. 2.

work of introducing us into God's favour and presence but Christ alone; for there is none but 'one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.'"[52][53]

Hence we see how erroneous and inconsistent with the word of God is the Romish practice of praying to saints, instead of Christ, to intercede for them. Like the Pharisees of old, they make the word of God of no effect by their traditions. It says that there is one mediator only; but they for this one substitute many mediators, and daily address them as such. In Chimnitz's History of the Council of Trent, there is an extensive collection of prayers to saints, whom the Church of Rome has worshipped in this capacity. The two following addresses to Matthew and Sebastian are a specimen of this pitiful kind of impiety: "Holy Matthew, thee I suppliantly implore, that by thy merits and intercessions, I may receive from our common Lord, Jesus Christ, the pardon of my sins in this world, and in the future may obtain eternal life;" and, "O Blessed Sebastian, great is thy faith; intercede for us with the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may be preserved from epidemic death, and every infirmity of body and mind, by thy intercession."[54] All that is said in the first chapter about the false assumptions of the Council of Trent regarding saint and angel worship applies here, and abundantly shows that "we have no warrant, either from Scripture or from primitive antiquity, to invocate saints, with the special purpose of obtaining their intercessory

---

[52] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

[53] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 203.

[54] Chimnicii Exam. Concil. Trident. pp. 580–611.

prayers, either for ourselves or for any other individuals."[55]

From all these considerations, then, it is evident that acceptable prayer must be the prayer of well-directed faith; for "God must be invoked in prayer; but invocation is the work of faith, nor can it take place without faith,"[56]—faith in the being, attributes, and promises of God; faith in the certainty of having every reasonable petition granted, so far as it may be for God's glory and the good of all concerned; faith in the sufficiency and readiness of Christ to enable us by his spirit to pray aright, and to present our prayers and make them acceptable to the Father; faith to offer up all our requests in his name, and in that of no other, and to leave all in his hands as our Advocate and Intercessor on high.

3. We should pray with earnestness.

It was a common opinion among the ancient Chinese that "all external adoration is vain and insignificant if it does not proceed from the heart and is not animated by the inward sentiments."[57] The modern "Jews have this sentence written upon the wall of their synagogues: *Prayer, without the intention of the mind, is but a body without a soul.* A man's prayer may be a lie. As a profession without sanctity is a lie to the world, so prayer without sincerity is a lie to God."[58] "The spirit, not words; life, not expression only, constitute prayer with God. Language may give it a form, but language alone is like mere body without a soul; and he that offers it

---

[55] Faber's Difficulties of Romanism, pp. 217, 439.

[56] Wirtembergica Confessio, Art. Oratio.

[57] Ancient Universal History, vol. xx. p. 128.

[58] Mead's Almost Christian, ed. 1825, p. 112.

renders to God a dead, unclean carcase for a living sacrifice, which is an abomination in his sight,"[59] and revolting to all common sense. "If ye offer the blind for a sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord."[60] "It is certain that the greater part of men, as they babble out vain, languid, and inefficacious prayers, most unworthy the ear of the blessed God, so they seem, in some degree, to set a just estimate upon them, neither hoping for any success from them, nor, indeed, seeming to be at all solicitous about it, but committing them to the wind as vain words, which in truth they are."[61]

"The prayer of the wicked; the supplication of those who mock him with a solemn sound upon a thoughtless tongue; the petitions of such he will not answer."[62] "Sinners, and those in whose spirit is guile, God hears not. By mere formalities and rites he is not pleased;"[63] for "prayer is nothing worth if heart and hand do not join in it."[64]

Such services offered to God are so offensive to him that nothing but the mercy which he is continually exercising over the chief of sinners protects the heartless and hypocritical worshipper from divine vengeance. For similar unwarranted acts, many instances of awful judgments are recorded in Scripture. Nadab and Abihu,

---

[59] Serle's Christian Remembrancer, 1819, p. 119. [60] Mal. i. 8.
[61] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.
[62] Mrs. Taylor of Ongar's Hints, p. 149.
[63] Cocceius on Job i. 5.
[64] Adams's Private Thoughts, p. 252.

for offering strange fire on God's altar, were burnt to death;[65] Uzzah, for using improper liberties with the ark, was smitten of God and died;[66] the Scribes and Pharisees, for their hypocritical professions of godliness, had woe denounced against them, even by the Saviour of sinners;[67] Ananias and Sapphira, for pretending to honour the cause of Christ, while they were lying to the Holy Ghost, were struck by the hand of God, and fell down dead;[68] Simon Magus, for giving his heart to the world, while asking the gifts of the Spirit,[69] was cursed of the apostles, and, so far as can be ascertained, died a hardened apostate, deceiving and being deceived.[70]

"He who lifts up his hands to God without any elevation of his heart affronts him, instead of adoring him. He offers, not a living and a breathing victim, but a dead and lifeless carcase; and with such a sacrifice how can God be well pleased?"[71] And if he be not well pleased, how can the worshipper be safe? "If we say our prayers in a cold, supine, lifeless manner, now and then, I know no other effect they will have but to enhance our condemnation."[72]

Not only, then, is "prayer which is only in words, without the movement of a pure mind towards God, and without faith, of no value in the sight of God, who, as he is a Spirit, wishes also to be worshipped in spirit and in truth;[73] but it is highly dangerous to the worshipper

---

[65] Lev. x. 2. [66] 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. [67] Matt. xxiii. 13–23.
[68] Acts v. 1–10. [69] Acts viii. 20, 21, 23.
[70] Cave's Life of Peter, p. 45; Stackhouse's History of the Bible, vol. vi. pp. 439, 440.
[71] Bishop Atterbury's Serm., Lam. iii. 41.
[72] Seed's Serm., Rom. xii. 12.
[73] Zanchius on Eph. vi. 18.

himself, because it is offensive to God, who is insulted thereby.

"Without some measure of earnestness prayer cannot be, and without a considerable measure it can scarcely be, acceptable; for, unless we heartily desire to obtain the things we ask, is it not a mere mockery to implore them at the hand of God?"[74] "How can that be a prayer, when the lips utter a sound but the thoughts are wandering elsewhere? God respects the mind more than outward words."[75] "Cold and lifeless devotions will not reach half-way to heaven. Be fervent and importunate; importunity will carry it; but without violence the kingdom of heaven will not be taken."[76] "To be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,"[77] is the only way to success; for the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."[78]

"Prayer is the greatest work that a creature can be engaged in" (because it refers to his most lasting and important interests, and because it is carried on with the greatest Being in the universe), "and, therefore, is to be performed with the greatest seriousness, reverence, and earnestness that possibly we can raise up our spirits to."[79] "Prayer is to be offered up to God with our whole heart, and requires all the warmth and earnestness of our passions and affections. Both our duty and interest oblige us to address ourselves to him with the closest application; and if we consider the subject of

---

[74] Bowdler's Tracts, pp. 263, 264.

[75] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. c. 27, sec. 9.

[76] Alleine's Alarm, p. 153.

[77] Rom. xii. 11. [78] Jas. v. 16.

[79] Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts, p. 292.

our prayers at all times, and especially when we ask for pardon, we cannot be cold and indifferent, we cannot but be pressing and importunate, we cannot suffer our eyes to sleep, nor our eyelids to slumber, nor the temples of our head to take any rest, till we have obtained the desired blessing."[80] "The pardon of our sins is the effect of God's highest favour, of that love which is peculiar to his children; 'tis the fruit of our Saviour's bloody sufferings; without it we are miserable forever; and can we expect to obtain it by a formal superficial prayer? It deserves the flower and zeal of our affections. How solicitous and vehement and unsatisfied should we be till we have the clear testimony that we are in a state of divine favour!"[81]

"Did men reflect that in their prayers they were asking the eternal life of their souls, they would pray with greater attention, seriousness, and fervour than, it is to be feared, they generally do. No formal lifeless petitions would proceed from their lips, but their hearts would be engaged as well as their tongues."[82] "Prayer being the expression of the heart's desire to God, we should with all simplicity and sincerity open our hearts unto him,"[83] and give up to him all the energies and affections of our mind. "Prayer implies sincere and vigorous desires, yea, hungerings and thirstings after God and spiritual blessings."[84]

"God will be served with absolute self-resignation,

---

[80] Newlin's Serm., Luke xi. 4.
[81] Bates, in Sheppard's Thoughts, p. 160.
[82] Orton on Eternity, p. 63.
[83] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 61.
[84] Scott's Essays, p. 381.

without exceptions, limitations, or reserves. You must serve him as those that are wholly his, and not your own, and have nothing but what is his, and therefore nothing to be excepted, reserved, or saved from him. It is requisite that you be serious and sober in all the service that you perform unto God. Do it not with half a heart. Be as much more fervent and serious in seeking God and your salvation than you are in seeking worldly things, as God and your salvation are better than any thing in the world."[85] "Draw near to God in prayer, with a true heart; a deceitful heart and feigned lips are abomination in the sight of that God who trieth the reins of the children of men. Must you be put in mind that if you regard iniquity in your heart the Lord will not hear you?"[86] "I would recommend earnestness and affection to you; not only for your greater profit, but to prevent your apostasy. Unless you make God and his service your hearty choice, you will not carry it long as your burden, but will soon be tempted to throw it down. Be concerned, therefore, I beseech you, to attend to his instituted worship, not in a careless and formal manner, but let the desire of your souls be to his name and the remembrance of him."[87]

"Let us never forget that it is the heart which must pray. The heart may pray when no words are uttered. But, if the heart be not engaged in prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude offensive sounds in the ear of the Almighty."[88] God says, "Give me thine

---

[85] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, pp. 93, 101.

[86] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 210.

[87] Witherspoon's Sermons, Ex. xxxviii. 18.

[88] Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.

heart," and condemns those who "draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him," "who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." Let the language of our souls, therefore, be, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."[89]

"Oh for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!"[90]

If it thus appear that to pray to God without earnestness, or in a cold, formal, careless manner, is useless, unacceptable, offensive, and dangerous, and that to pray with fervour and all the affections and energies of our minds must be successful, and is required by the very nature of true devotion and preserves us from many evil things, then surely we should stir up our souls, and all that is within us, when we worship God, and present our requests to him with all the sincerity, ardour, and anxiety of persons pleading for life in the very last extremity, and the life, too, of their guilty spirits.

4. We should pray with a spirit of praise and gratitude. Every one has received innumerable blessings from God, for which the very force of natural feeling, if not blunted and enfeebled by habits of hardened vice, must convince him that he ought to be grateful, and also to acknowledge his gratitude in his daily devotions. Not to feel thankfulness rising in the heart for favours received shows a base and brutish spirit; and not to own

[89] Ps. xlii. 15. [90] Cowper.

them is the next thing to denying the receipt of them, which shows a false and wicked spirit; and where these marks of an unregenerate and sinful state of mind exist, there is a dangerous alienation or departure of the heart from the best friend of man. From common sense itself, "it is plain that whatever we are concerned to pray for when we want it, that we are bound to thank God for when he vouchsafes to bestow it."[91] This has always been so obvious, that the ancient heathens, by the light of reason, unaided by revelation, were led to make thanksgiving a great part of the worship which they rendered to their gods. Homer has recorded many instances of this among the Greeks. At their feasts, he has informed us,

> "Each pour'd to Jove, before the bowl was crown'd,
> And large libations drench'd the thirsty ground."[92]

And then

> "With hymns divine the joyous banquet ends,
> The pæans lengthen'd till the sun descends."[93]

Nay, "the first original of the drama was a religious worship, consisting only of a chorus, which was nothing else but a hymn to the Deity."[94] The Roman historians also inform us of many public thanksgivings which their countrymen were accustomed to offer up to their gods. The following is a form of thanksgiving, commonly used by the victorious generals, who were honoured with a triumph to celebrate their exploits: "Most great and

---

[91] Barrow's Sermon on 1 Tim. ii. 10.

[92] Pope's Homer's Iliad, b. vii. ll. 576, 577.

[93] Homer, in Addison's Evidences, ed. 1806, p. 226.

[94] Ibid. p. 229.

good Jupiter, and thou queen Juno, with all the other gods who guard this holy place, I give you thanks with all my heart, that you have vouchsafed to this very day and hour to preserve and increase the Republic by my means; I earnestly pray you to be always favorable unto it, and continually to keep, aggrandize, and protect it. These vows being put up aloud, the conqueror made Jupiter the present of a crown, with the spoils of the enemy, especially those that were called *optima spolia*, which the general himself had taken with his own hand."[a]

If such was the feeling of heathens, in ancient times, towards their imaginary deities, what ought the Christian worshipper to feel towards the living and true God for all his fatherly kindness and numberless blessings? "If we owed no other gratitude to our Creator, we should owe it for this at least, that he has made gratitude itself so delightful."[b]

But this is not the only cause that a Christian has for pouring out his thanksgivings to God in prayer. "The subject of true devotion evermore gives thanks to the Father of mercies"[c] for every thing in his lot, whether natural or spiritual. He particularly "admires the victorious grace that would never desist from striving with him till it had overcome," and "endeavours that he may more and more abound in joy and praise"[d] on that account. All the other benefits of redemption, too, added to those of creation and preservation, crowd in upon his

---

[a] Lardner's Antiquities, vers. *Triumphus.*

[b] Brown's Philosophy, ed. 8vo, p. 425.

[c] [illegible]'s Calvinism, ch. 7, 16.

[d] Howe's Redeemer's Tears, ed. 3d, p. 121.

soul, and furnish him with inexhaustible matter of gratitude and praise to the Giver of all his blessings. "He is deeply sensible of the bounty of his Maker in all the providences relating both to his body and soul. Food and raiment, health and strength, he day by day receives as undeserved instances of the loving-kindness of his God; and all these common blessings keep alive a glow of gratitude to God within him. But much more is he excited to thankfulness upon considering the mercies relating to his eternal interest."[99]

"The goodness of God already exercised towards us, our present dependence upon him, and our expectation of future benefits, ought, and have a natural tendency, to beget in us the affection of gratitude."[100] We must feel that "in the existence God has given us, and in the benefits which attach us strongly to it, this shows him to be the first and greatest object of our gratitude."[101] The blessings of others, also, is a subject that should excite our gratitude; for "as we must pray for others, so also we must give thanks to God for others."[102] The apostle not only orders prayers and supplications, but also "thanksgiving to be made for others."[103]

But, to make these various manifestations of the divine goodness properly affect our minds, we must often make them subjects of meditation; for "if a person be dwelling perpetually on his wants he cannot be thankful; but a catalogue of the blessings which God has bestowed upon him, often reviewed, would sweeten the spirit and tend

---

[99] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 148.

[100] Bishop Butler's Sermon on Matt. xxii. 32.

[101] Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 97.

[102] 1 Tim. ii. 1.

[103] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. c. 29, sec. 2.

to fill him with gratitude and love"[104] It is only in this way that our minds are brought to have a right sense of the value of God's gifts and are prepared to make a right use of them. When we do not see and think much of our blessings, we cannot be grateful for them; and there is always, therefore, "a danger of ingratitude hindering the success of our petitions. He that is not careful to pay his old debts cannot expect so much credit as to run upon a new score Under the law, when any one came before God to make any special request for himself, he was to bring with him a peace-offering, that is, an offering of thanks, for the favours he had already enjoyed, thereby to prepare himself for what he expected."[105]

Thanksgiving "is part of that tribute which God our King expects at our hands for all the favours we receive from him;" and "it very ill becomes a creature to partake of benefits from his God, and then to forget his heavenly benefactor and grow regardless of that bounty whence his comforts flow."[106] Hence the command runs in such terms as these: "Serve the Lord with gladness; enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise,"[107] "making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."[108] "In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."[109] "By

---

[104] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 92.
[105] Bishop Wilkins on Prayer, ed. 1674, p. 214.
[106] Watts's Guide to Prayer, ed. 8th, p. 26.
[107] Ps. c. 2, 4. [108] Eph. v. 19, 20. [109] 1 Thess. v. 18.

him," therefore, "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."[110] Let us "labour to affect our souls with thanks, to quicken and raise up our hearts in offering up unto God the sacrifice of praise, that we may come before his throne with hallelujahs, with the voice of joy and thankfulness."[111]

This we ought to do in every place and in all circumstances; for in no situation should we neglect to own our obligations to God. "Each field should appear to us a temple, where we should offer up prayers and praises to our Creator, and where all our actions, thoughts, and words should tend to his glory;"[112] and we cannot praise him enough, even when we have availed ourselves of all opportunities and used our utmost exertions. "We may speak much, and yet come short. How shall we be able to magnify him? for he is great above all his works. When ye glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as ye can; for even yet will he far exceed; and when ye exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough."[113] The strength and the fervour of the highest angel would not be sufficient to utter all the praise which is due to God from us. How, then, can it be thought that, without gratitude, any prayer can please him?

The prayer which flows from a grateful heart must, for these reasons, be so far acceptable to God, and the prayer which has not this requisite cannot find acceptance in his sight. Let these considerations move every worshipper to praise God with fervent thankfulness.

---

110 Heb. xiii. 15. 111 Bp. Wilkins on Prayer, pp. 231, 232.
112 Sturm's Reflections, May 28.
113 Eccles. xliii. 27, 28, 30.

5. We should pray with a spirit of benevolence. All that was advanced under the head of praying for others applies here. If it be our duty to pray for others, it is equally so to cherish kindly feeling towards them at all times, but especially when we present ourselves before Him who has said, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."[114] "Our prayers ought to be an exercise of extensive benevolence of heart; a solemn testimony offered up to the God of Love of our kind and charitable affection to all men."[115]

"We are bound in common charity to love all men and to wish well to them; but our bare wishes signify nothing, unless we direct them to God, who is able to confer upon them the blessings and good things which we wish to them. And this is a charity which God hath put into every man's power, and which the poorest man in the world, as well as the richest, is capable of exercising at all times and upon all occasions."[116] Hence it is evident that "our prayer should not only be of faith towards God, but also of charity towards our neighbour."[117]

This applies to the way in which we should feel towards the whole of mankind. But the feeling with regard to real Christians should have a more particular character. "The intimate relations by which the covenant of grace connects" them "with one another, as well as with their common Father," are peculiarly designed and calculated to "produce intercessions; those expres-

---

[114] John xv. 12.

[115] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.

[116] Archbishop Tillotson's Serm., 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

[117] Zanchius, Eph. vi. 18.

sions of benevolence in which they commend one another to his care."[118]

The feeling becomes still more concentrated when directed to Christian friends, to whom nature and grace have so bound us as to make it one of our clearest and most imperative duties to cultivate kindly affections towards them. "We must pray for our friends, and those that are nearly related to us, that God would deliver them from all the evils they feel or fear, and bestow upon them all the good we wish for ourselves, here or hereafter." But if we have a truly sanctified affection for them, it will unavoidably connect them with, and make us pray for, the church of Christ, of which they either are, or we wish them to be, a part, or portion. "Zion lies near the heart of God, and her name is written upon the palms of the hands of our Redeemer, and the welfare of Zion should be much upon our hearts."[119] As our good will becomes the stronger and the more active in proportion to its being directed to those kinds of objects which are most specific and impressive, various suggestions have been tried to give it scope in this way.

Of these one is to make a particular enumeration, in our prayers, of every person or family in whose welfare we are interested. It has been said that "if we made it a rule of piety and kindness daily to offer up particular intercession for one individual or one household, and this successively for each," till we went round the whole circle of our connections in our devotional remembrances, "these secret visits of the heart would,

[118] Prin. Hill's Lectures, b. v. chap. 5, sec. 3.
[119] Watts's Guide to Prayer, p. 14; ib. p. 13.

in many instances, be far more frequent than our personal or epistolary intercourse could be; those, of course, claiming precedence in our thoughts whose feelings or circumstances were known to demand, at the time, peculiar sympathy or interest."[120]

But our benevolence must go beyond the circle of our friends and all those, whether Christians or not, who have given us no particular personal cause of complaint, and must comprehend even our enemies, and all who have done or intended evil to us. "Christ requires of us, indiscriminately, that we forgive all who have sinned against us;[121] that is, being sensible of our own guilt, we must neither procure nor wish for evil to them; for he who does that (to speak in the words of Claudian) is savage, and seems to prefer the vengeance of the law to himself."[122] "Since it is possible that we ourselves, or our neighbour, may give cause of offence, so also we may, in either case, be deficient in our duty. In the first place, when we have done another an injury, by neglecting him, by not asking his forgiveness, or by not giving him the satisfaction which equity demands; in the second place, when we have been hurt by another, by conceiving revenge, and by showing a spirit of an unforgiving nature. For how can he hope for the forgiveness, for which he prays from God, of greater sins, who is unwilling to forgive the smaller sins of his fellow-servants? How requisite is it," then, "that we be endowed with those virtues the neglect of which does

---

120 Sheppard's Thoughts, ed. 6th, p. 175.

121 Matt. xviii. 32–35.

122 Claudian, in Grotius de Jure Bell. et Pac. lib. ii. cap. 20, sec. 10, 5.

most especially prevent the hearing of our prayers! But of these the chief is the cultivation of brotherly love. The vices opposed to it are ill will and hatred, and especially a mind set against brotherly reconciliation."[123] These must render our prayers utterly useless. The very idea of prayer for others implies the reverse of these. It implies that there is a benevolent principle working in the mind, and expanding its affections beyond what is offensive, to take in the good of those for whom we pray. It has, therefore, been said that "our thoughts, like the waters of the sea when exhaled towards heaven, will lose their offensive bitterness and saltness, leave behind them each distasteful quality, and sweeten into an amiable humanity and candour, till they descend in gentle showers of love and kindness upon our fellow-creatures."[124]

The expressions in the Lord's prayer, which we are taught to use in reference to those who have given us offence, are wisely designed to touch our consciences with a feeling of the necessity of cultivating benevolent affections to all, and of forgiving, as we hope to be forgiven. The words are, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."[125] Now, the slightest reflection must bring us to the conclusion that "those who, retaining malice in their hearts, put up this prayer unto God, do in effect pray down divine vengeance upon their souls."[126] This is also evident from other sayings of our Saviour, which he uttered to illustrate the bearings of this important subject. "If ye forgive men their tres-

[123] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sec. 3.
[124] Seed's Serm., Rom. xii. 12.
[125] Matt. vi. 12.
[126] Poole on Matt. vi. 12.

passes," said he, "your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses;"[127] for "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."[128] "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."[129] Nay more,[130] "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."[131] So did our Saviour: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;"[132] and Stephen: "He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."[133] So did David: "I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother."[134] This he said in reference to those who had rendered him evil for good. The general practice of inspired and regenerated men, indeed, and the word of God, agree with the injunction of the apostle when he gave these instructions to Timothy: "I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath;"[135] and to the Ephesians: "Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."[136]

6. We should pray frequently and perseveringly.

All the considerations which refer generally to a con-

---

[127] Matt. vi. 14, 15.
[128] Matt. vii. 2.
[129] Matt. v. 23, 24.
[130] Poole on Matt. v. 24.
[131] Matt. v. 44.
[132] Luke xxiii. 34.
[133] Acts vii. 60.
[134] Ps. xxxv. 14.
[135] 1 Tim. ii. 8.
[136] Eph. iv. 32.

tinued attention to prayer, and particularly to certain times and seasons for prayer, are here applicable.

1. Generally: Unwearied continuance in prayer is necessary to success; and if the things asked for be proper, and the way in which they are asked be in other respects right, this will certainly succeed. It must be kept in mind, however, that without these qualifications no success can be reasonably expected, even with perseverance.

"Many venture to ask of God, who have no share in that fellowship which implies in it converse with him, whose evil passions and evil deeds preclude them from hoping that they shall receive what they desire. And many even of the faithful ask unwisely. It is necessary, even for their own sakes, to deny what they request, that they may be saved from unsuspected dangers, that their spiritual pride may be humbled, or that their hearts may be weaned from what is earthly."[137] "The Christian may sometimes, and certainly does, ask what would prove very hurtful to him. Therefore it is his unspeakable mercy that the Lord wisely and graciously withholds every thing of this kind, and only confers what he knows will tend to his real good. God would not be a friend to his own children were he always to give them what they asked. He loves them too well for that, but never withholds any one good thing that, in the smallest degree, will contribute either to their present or future welfare."[138] "He only keeps back any thing from his children, either because it is not

---

[137] Dr. Brunton's Serm., 1 John i. 3.

[138] Major Burn's Who Fares Best, p. 64.

good for them at all, or not in the time and for the purpose for which they desired it;"[139] for "God denies a Christian nothing but with a design to give him something better."[140] In short, "there may be various causes which prevent the hearing of prayer; either because man does not pray aright, or not according to the will of God; for this may happen, inasmuch as the petitioner himself is ungodly; inasmuch as he asks not of faith; inasmuch as he asks what is bad or against the divine will; inasmuch as though what he asks be good, he asks it for a bad end; inasmuch as he asks any thing opposite to what God has decreed, or what may be a hindrance to God giving something better, viz., for the glory of God or eternal salvation; or the granting of which God may choose to defer, that he may put our faith and constancy to the test; or because he wishes us to pray often, and not otherwise grant our petitions; or, lastly, because he wishes to give us better things than we ask;"[141] for "the Giver of every good and perfect gift bestows his favours in his own way and time."[142]

Making all allowance for these causes of denial or delay, there is the strongest certainty of success in persevering prayer. God would never have commanded us to pray "always,"[143] and to "pray without ceasing,"[144] if he had not determined to grant our request when offered up in this manner. The very idea of obedience

---

[139] Serle's Christian Remembrancer, 1819, p. 124.

[140] Cecil's Remains, ed. 8th, p. 391.

[141] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 28, sec. 17.

[142] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. iii. p. 179.

[143] Eph. vi. 18.

[144] 1 Thess. v. 17.

to his command supposes his approbation and the reward of obedience.

But this command must not be understood to signify that "in every instant, or singular point of time," we are "actually to apply our minds to prayer; for to do this is in itself impossible, and therefore can be no matter of duty. It is inconsistent with other duties, and, therefore, must not be practised."[145] It "may mean, *either* that one and the same thing is to be asked from God without intermission until we obtain it, wherefore if we do not obtain immediately what we ask we must not give over on that account, but must insist until, so to speak, we overcome the benignity of God by continued entreaties, which the Lord signally illustrates in the example of the widow importuning the unjust judge without intermission;[146] *or* that he may try the faith and constancy of the suppliant; for that is not a laudable faith which only prays once or twice, but which compels the suppliant, though often repulsed, to insist without ceasing. Such was the faith of the blind man,[147] and especially of the Cananitish woman."[148] [149] Further, it "may import the maintaining in our minds a ready disposition or habitual inclination to devotion; a vigilant attendance on devotion, the mind ever so directing its eyes as quickly to espy and readily to snatch any advantages; embracing all fit seasons and emergent occasions of devotion; assiduous urgency till our requests are

---

[145] Barrow on 1 Thess. v. 17.
[146] Luke xviii. 1, &c.
[147] Luke xviii. 37.
[148] Matt. xv. 22.
[149] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sec. 12.

granted; devout ejaculations of prayer and praise; and frequency."[150]

"Real devotion is not confined to set times and forms. The subject of it prays without ceasing, and evermore gives thanks to the Father of mercies. In every place, and at all seasons, he lifts up his heart to heaven, without wrath or doubting."[151] Of this Job was an instance. "The constancy of his custom is remarkable. He never felt secure. Though he had children sufficiently well trained and obedient, yet at no time did he lay aside his solicitude for them,"[152] but ever bore them on his mind before the hearer of prayer. David prayed seven times a day.[153] A Turkish ambassador at London, in 1785, said to Hannah More, as reported in Roberts's memoir of that lady, "I am not ashamed to own that I retire five times a day to offer up prayer." Luther was another (to mention no more of the host of persevering and constant worshippers whose habits history records) who wonderfully exemplified this truth. It is said that "whatever opposition he found, whatever distemper was in his mind, or distraction in his soul, he presently carried it to the throne, and never gave over praying till he prayed his heart into the frame he prayed for;"[154] and in all other circumstances prayer was his constant, his never-failing, resource and support.

Such examples show the importance of the command to "continue instant in prayer,"[155] and well warrant the

---

[150] Barrow on 1 Thess. v. 17.

[151] Williams's Calvinism, chap. vii. 15.

[152] Cocceius on Job i. 5.

[153] Ps. lv. 17.

[154] Hill's It is Well, ed. 1828, p. 154.

[155] Rom. xii. 12.

giving of counsels like the following: "Be constant in your stated devotions at their returning seasons, and endeavour to keep your minds habitually prepared for those pious ejaculations which have so happy a tendency to promote the Christian temper, or for any sudden call you may have to address yourselves more solemnly to the Divine Majesty."[156]

Again, "you must ask for a long time before you can obtain; you must press, solicit, and even importune; the sweets and the consolations of prayer are the fruit and the reward of prayer itself. If you seldom pray, the Lord will be a strange and unknown God to you. You have so long suffered him to knock at the gate of your heart before you opened it to him, you have disputed, struggled against him, wavered, deferred, so much, before you gave yourself to him, that is it not just that he leave you to solicit for some time before he give himself to you with all the consolations of his grace?"[157] "God will be served resolutely and constantly. If you will reign, you must conquer, and endure unto the end. You must overcome if you would not be overcome."[158] "You may not obtain the first time you ask; the promise gives no assurance that you shall. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, and besought the Lord thrice, or frequently, before he was heard. You may not obtain the very thing you ask; but, asking aright, you will obtain that which will fully satisfy the spiritual mind."[159]

It is only, indeed, when our minds are spiritualized

---

[156] Doddridge on 1 Thess. v. 17.

[157] Massillon on Matt. xv. 22.

[158] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, p. 101.

[159] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 13.

by the Holy Ghost giving the right effect to our experience, in waiting for the answer to our prayers and persevering in the duties of devotion, that we are fitted to receive or enjoy the blessings that we pray for. "We end by perceiving, even in this life, why we have suffered, and why we have not obtained what we desired. The melioration of our hearts reveals to us the benevolent intention which subjected us to pain; for the prosperities of the earth themselves would have something dreadful about them if they fell upon us after we had been guilty of great faults."[160] To purify us, therefore, from our faults, and fit our souls to relish and use aright God's gifts, it is wise and good in God to subject us to the pain of anxiety and hope deferred, to try our faith and self-denial, to put all our virtues to the test of endurance, by requiring us to pray often and long for what we desire.

If it thus appears that, for the wisest and the most benevolent reasons, God denies our requests, or defers granting them till he has sufficiently tried us and made us fit for the blessings we ask, by exercising us in a spirit of devotion, then it is manifest that we "ought always to pray and not faint."[161] Let us not, therefore, "be weary in" this department of "well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not;"[162] but let us "watch unto prayer,"[163] and continue steadfast therein till God send us an answer in peace from his sanctuary.

2. But, to be more particular, frequency and perse-

---

[160] De Stael's Germany, vol. iii. p. 320, in Brewster's Testimonies, p. 300.

[161] Luke xviii. 1.

[162] Gal. vi. 9; 2 Thess. iii. 13.

[163] 1 Peter iv. 7.

verance in prayer imply a constant readiness to avail ourselves of all favourable times and seasons for offering up our devotions to God. Hence, on the Lord's day, and whenever any other opportunity occurs, it is evident that we ought to attend to the duty of

Public Prayer.

By the law of Moses, every seventh day was set aside for public worship, and was expressed by the name of "an holy convocation."[164] To this appointment it was that the command alluded, "Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord."[165] Many fasts and festivals were also appointed for rendering public homage to God, and, therefore, were likewise termed "holy convocations."[166] Public services, too, were instituted to be performed by the priests and Levites in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple, every day. In the times of David and Solomon, regular worship was kept up, both day and night, by the priests and Levites, who were divided into courses, to make the service the less burdensome. The 134th psalm seems to have been addressed to the division of these office-bearers that served during the night or morning watch, and the 135th to the one that ministered by day. Many allusions are also made in various parts of Scripture to the morning and evening sacrifices which were publicly offered every day to God. "We read of the third hour, that is, nine o'clock in the morning, when the morning sacrifice was offered, of the sixth hour, that is, mid-day,

---

[164] Lev. xxiii. 3. [165] Lev. xix. 30. [166] Lev. xxiii. 2.

and of the ninth hour, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon, as seasons of prayer."[167]

When the synagogues became established places of worship (the origin of which is uncertain, though it is generally believed that they sprung up after the Babylonish captivity), "the times appointed for worship in them were three days a week, besides their holidays, whether fasts or festivals, and thrice on every one of those days, that is, in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night."[168]

In the early ages of Christianity, too, "the Christians offered up their ordinary prayers at three stated times of the day, viz. at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour, according to the custom observed among the Jews."[169] This they did both publicly and privately, so far as they had opportunity and the circumstances of the times permitted.

Among the followers of Mahomet there are "five set times of prayer in a day."[170] Where a regular mosque-service is established, "the public prayers are said before sunrising and after sunset. Two others may be said apart, at noon and before sunset; and a third in the night, before the first watch."[171] They have everywhere, indeed, "stated times in every day for public prayer; and, when these hours arrive, the more devout persons, or those who wish to appear devout, hasten to perform their devotions on the very spot where they happen to be

---

167 Brewster's Lect. on Matt. vi. 5.

168 Stackhouse's History of the Bible, ed. 1796, vol. iv. p. 550.

169 Mosheim's Church History, ed. 1803, vol. i. p. 293.

170 Ockley's History of the Saracens, ed. 2d, vol. i. p. 260.

171 Upham's History of the Ottoman Empire, vol. i. p. 16.

at that instant, whatever may be the employment in which they are engaged, or the company in which they are placed."[172]

Nay, "all the nations of the earth have, as with one consent, agreed to institute forms of worship, to hold meetings, at certain times, in honour of their deities. Survey the societies of men in their rudest state; explore the African deserts, the wilds of America, or the distant isles of the ocean, and you will find that, over all the earth, some religious ceremonies have obtained. You will everywhere trace, in one form or other, the temple, the priest, and the offering." This universal prevalence of religious homage, however diversified in its modes and objects, shows it to be consonant with reason that, "where blessings are received in common, an obligation lies upon the community jointly to acknowledge them, and before the world to honour their Benefactor."[173]

This is the conclusion to which the common sense of all thinking persons must come; for "if it be necessary that men should worship the Supreme Being inwardly, it seems highly proper that there should be some outward acts of religious homage openly expressive of that inward adoration, reverence, and gratitude. Without some such external acts of worship, men cannot join in social acts of devotion, or in rendering to God public worship, without which scarce any appearance of religion can be maintained in the world. It is the voice of nature and reason, in which all mankind have generally agreed, that there should be external as well as internal worship rendered

---

[172] Brewster's Lect. on Matt. vi. 5.

[173] Blair's Serm., Ps. xxvi. 8.

to God, and that there should be sacred rites appointed for the better regulating and ordering that external worship. Accordingly,"[174] even Lord Bolingbroke "owns that the best and wisest of the heathens approved the political institutions of an external service, as far as they helped to keep up a lively sense of these duties in the minds of men, and to promote the practice of them."[175] "If the worship of God be a duty of religion, public worship is a necessary institution; forasmuch as without it the greater part of mankind would exercise no religious worship at all." Besides, "joining in prayer and praise to their common Creator and Governor has a sensible tendency to unite mankind together and to cherish and enlarge the generous affections."[176] "Nature, and consequently the God of nature, require public worship; for devotion is infectious, like joy or grief, and by mutual communication in a numerous assembly is greatly invigorated."[177] "Certainly, great are the advantages which the people of God, when they are met together, do mutually receive from it. The cold and remiss worshipper is, at the sight of an exemplary piety, kindled into some degrees of holy warmth; the fervent and devout, in the presence of it, becomes yet more inflamed; a religious emulation then rises in the breasts of the faithful, a holy strife and desire of excelling."[178] It "tends to increase our own devotion, and to raise like sentiments in others and make them thus partakers of this sublime

---

174 Leland's Deistical Writers, ed. 5th, vol. ii. p. 54.
175 Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 208, in ibid.
176 Paley's Moral Philosophy, b. v. chap. 4, par. 3.
177 Lord Kames's Sketches, 6, 284, in Br. Test. p. 317.
178 Bishop Atterbury's Serm., Ps. xcv. 6.

enjoyment."[179] "Public prayer is most necessary for averting judgments, obtaining blessings, and preserving love and unity among Christians."[180]

It also "most honours God, and is the grand end of our assembling together."[181] "The honour of God is more promoted by his being worshipped publicly than privately; because private prayer is piety confined within our own breasts, but public prayer is piety exemplified in our outward actions; it is the beauty of holiness made visible; our light shines out before men in the eye of the world; it enlarges the interests of godliness, and keeps up a face and sense of religion among mankind."[182] Too often, however, the face is kept up when the sense is wanting. Hence "it has been observed, how empty would our congregations sometimes be, if no more bodies were present than there are souls, and what abundance of sorry service hath our God that nobody sees! 'When they have heard, Satan taketh away the word.'"[183][184] But "when the proper matter of prayer is kept to and expressed, all may bring themselves to a fit temper for joining sincerely in it."[185]

Impressed with these views of the obligation and usefulness of public worship, an eminent judge gave this advice to his family: "Be strict and religious observers of the Lord's day. Resort to your parish church twice that day, if your health will permit, and attend diligently and reverently to the public prayers and sermons. He

---

[179] Hutcheson's Introd. to Moral Philosophy, b. i. chap. 4, sec. 3.
[180] Willison's Sabbath, p. 128.
[181] Scott's Essays, p. 391.
[182] Seed's Serm., Rom. xii. 12.
[183] Mark iv. 15.
[184] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 143.
[185] Gerard's Pastoral Care, chap. iii. sec. 2.

cannot reasonably expect a blessing from God the rest of the week, that neglects his duty to God in the due consecration of this day to the special service and duty to God which this day requires."[186] A distinguished nobleman gave similar counsel to his son, when he said, "Frequent the church and the houses of God; let no business invade or intrude upon your religious hours. What you have destined to the service of God is already sacred to him, and cannot, without great profaneness, be alienated from him and conferred upon others."[187] "The express commandment of the Almighty affords the plain and undoubted rule for man's obedience in this as in all other things."[188] And, in obedience to that commandment, "we have places set apart for public worship, and are countenanced in the exercise of it by lawful authority; and therefore it must discover a strange perverseness of temper, and an unpardonable contempt both of God and man, to withdraw from the place of public worship, and on any pretence whatever to refuse to bear a part in such a becoming and rational service."[189]

From every view of this duty, then, it must be evident that no man who admits the propriety of any religion at all can, with any appearance of consistency, attempt to justify the neglect of public prayer. He can only reason as a fool, who undertakes the task; and he can only think as an infidel, who believes it not criminal. Inasmuch, therefore, as all the considerations now stated

---

186 Sir Matthew Hale's Counsels, Letter I.

187 Marquis of Argyle's Instructions to his Son, in Br. Test. p. 316.

188 Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Observance of the Lord's Day, 1832.

189 Walker's Serm., Exod. xx. 8.

show us the obligation and utility of public worship, let us make it our constant and conscientious endeavour to attend to it. Let us never, when we have an opportunity, "forsake the assembling of ourselves together,"[190] but be "glad when they say unto us, Let us go into the house of the Lord,"[191] and always be ready to "call upon his name, and pay our vows unto him in the presence of all his people;" being[192] assured that when we are "gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of us,"[193] and "make us joyful in his house of prayer."[194]

Frequency and perseverance in God's worship must also include

Family Prayer.

This duty ought to be performed at least every morning and every evening, wherever a clear case of justifiable omission does not exist, and also before and after meals, and even at other times, too, when any particular circumstance renders it expedient and useful.

"It is but too obvious that the neglect of family worship prevails chiefly among those who either are, or imagine themselves to be, of a better rank than others; nay, some who were punctual in the performance of this duty while their station and circumstances were low, have been observed to lay it aside when, by the bounty of Providence, their state became more prosperous."[195] But no distinction of this kind is admissible among the true worshippers of God. In the practice of good men, and the revealed will of the Lord of all, we see that "every

---

[190] Heb. x. 25. [191] Ps. cxxii. 1. [192] Ps. cxvi. 17.
[193] Matt. xviii. 20. [194] Isa. lvi. 7.
[195] Walker's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 20.

knee must bow, and every tongue confess," to "the Hearer of prayer."

"In all ages, wherever true religion has prevailed, every house has been a house of prayer."[196] "The most ancient priesthood was that which fathers, or heads of families, exercised in and for their families and kindred; and the divine institution of this was what all nations were so fully convinced of, that the public and established religions did not supersede it, but left it as they found it: so that, though private persons, who were not publicly called to that office, might not offer sacrifices on the public altars, yet each head of a family was priest for his own family, at his private focus, or domestic altar."[197]

"Family worship is a duty incumbent on masters of families every day, but more especially upon the Lord's day. The fourth commandment is principally directed to masters of families, because families, as such, are chiefly to be concerned in the keeping of it. Families have many joint errands to the throne of grace, which call for joint family prayers and praises. They often sin together, and therefore it is fit they confess and mourn together. They need many family blessings, and it is fit they jointly seek them. They are exposed to many family dangers; therefore they should jointly deprecate them. They receive many family mercies, which call for family thanksgivings. They work in their employments and labour together, and it is very fit they seek a blessing on them together. It is plain that as ministers are bound to rule the church, so masters of families are

[196] Malcolm's Help to Family Worship, ed. 2d, p. 12.

[197] Shuckford's Connexion, ed. 2d, vol. ii. p. 103.

bound to rule their families, which is not only by instructing them, but going before them in God's worship, and being their guide and mouth in prayers and praises." Therefore that heads of families "pray in secret is not sufficient. One duty will not supply the want of another. Secret prayer, O man, would be your duty although you had no family; yea, although you had no tongue or faculty of speech. Why hath God blessed you with a family, and with the faculty of speaking, but that you might be more capable to glorify him with and before others?"[198] "No master or mistress of a family can have a true concern for religion, or be a child of God, who does not take care to worship God by family prayer. Let the observation of the fact determine."[199]

"Secret devotion has an influence on domestic piety. He who hath found the pearl of great price himself cannot be indifferent whether his family find it or not. He who walks with God in his closet will not neglect the worship of God in his family."[200]

"That family prayer is included in the general direction to pray and watch thereunto with all perseverance, as a kind of prayer especially suited to the wants and circumstances of mankind, will not be questioned by most of those who profess the religion of the gospel; nor will it be doubted that every morning and every evening present a proper season for the performance of this religious service. The foundation of family prayer is laid in the intimate connection of those who are members of these little societies. This kind of worship naturally renders

[198] Willison's Sabbath, pp. 132, 133, 135–137.

[199] Hartley's Observations on Man, 2, 335, in Br. Test. p. 321.

[200] Gilfillan on the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, ed. 10th, p. 57.

our devotion intense and exalted, eminently contributes to domestic order and regularity, greatly strengthens parental government, in an eminent degree preserves and promotes religion in a family, and families have the best reason to expect the blessing of God in answer to their prayers."[201] They may, for example, "expect family protection, family provision, and more comfort and satisfaction in family relations;" while at the same time it "is an excellent mean to advance religion and reformation through the whole land,"[202] and thereby becomes a source of national as well as family good.

"The peculiar use of family piety consists in its influence upon servants and the young members of a family, who want sufficient seriousness and reflection to retire of their own accord to the exercise of private devotion, and whose attention you cannot easily command in public worship. The example, also, and authority of a father and master act in this way with the greatest force; for his private prayers, to which his children and servants are not witnesses, act not at all upon them as examples; and his attendance upon public worship they will readily impute to fashion, to a care to preserve appearances, to a concern for decency and character, and to many motives besides a sense of duty to God. Add to this that the ardour of devotion is better supported, and the sympathy more easily propagated, through a small assembly connected by the affections of domestic society, than in the presence of a mixed congregation."[203] "It has been well said, family worship, by mingling of hearts in the

[201] Dwight's Theology, Serm. on Eph. vi. 18, No. 141.
[202] Willison's Sabbath, pp. 143, 144.
[203] Paley's Moral Philosophy, 1822, p. 274.

exercise of devotion, tends to cherish every kindly affection, and that at such seasons every feeling is fanned by the breath of heaven." [204]

"It may be used as an engine of vast power in a family. It diffuses a sympathy through the members. It calls the mind off from the deadening effects of worldly affairs. It arrests every member with a morning and evening sermon, in the midst of all the hurries and cares of life. It says, There is a God! there is a spiritual world! there is a life to come! It fixes the idea of responsibility in the mind. It furnishes a tender and judicious father or master with an opportunity of gently glancing at faults where a direct admonition might be inexpedient. It enables him to relieve the weight with which subordination or service often sits on the minds of inferiors." [205] "It has a tendency to remove or allay all those unhappy passions to which our common nature is subject, and which, more or less, appear in every family. It unites the members of the family together, gives the head of it a feeling of tenderness and affection for those under him, and makes them esteem and love him." Besides, "many have found in family worship that help and communion with God which they had sought for with less effect in private prayer. It was the experience of one Christian, 'I find more of the presence of God, and more of the real spirit of prayer, in praying with my family, than in almost any other mean of grace.'" [206]

"All good men, indeed, have found such satisfactions in and derived such benefits from this practice that it

---

[204] Malcolm's Help, &c., p. 12.

[205] Cecil, in Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 150, 151.

[206] Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 150, 151.

has been to them one of their most pleasing habits. Abraham,[207] Joshua,[208] Job,[209] David,[210] our Saviour,[211] Cornelius,[212] and many other distinguished Scripture characters, have left examples of family worship, which all heads of families ought to imitate. All have, every day, "family sins, family wants, family friends, and family mercies,"[213] which they ought to make the subject of daily family prayer. It is not enough, therefore, to say, "I do pray with my family, on a Sunday. It is certainly better thus to collect your family together on the Sabbath than not at all; but you are required to instruct your family not merely on Sunday, but when you lie down and rise up.[214] Your limited performance of the duty shows that you really do not love and enjoy it: if you did, you would be more frequent in practising it."[215]

"Grace before and after meals is a part of family prayer, which no Christian master can neglect."[216] "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,"[217] is a command which includes this duty; and "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer;"[218] all which implies asking the divine blessing on our meals. Christ also sanctioned this practice, and made it imperative by his example when he "took bread, and blessed it," and afterwards "gave thanks;"[219] for though that was on an extraordinary occasion, yet it

---

207 Gen. xviii. 19. 208 Josh. xxiv. 15. 209 Job i. 5.
210 2 Sam. vi. 20. 211 Matt. xxvi. 30, &c. 212 Acts x. 2.
213 Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 161, 162. 214 Deut. vi. 7.
215 Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 155, 156. 216 Ibid. p. 163.
217 1 Cor. x. 31. 218 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. 219 Matt. xxvi. 26, 27.

showed what the habit of his life was. This is still more evident from other parts of the gospel, where he is represented as giving thanks for the supplies of food there mentioned.[220] Paul,[221] and other believers,[222] certainly followed his example, in the apostolical times. There can be no doubt, indeed, in the mind of any sober-thinking person that "it is the duty of a man to pray before he sits down to a meal. It is but just to direct our thoughts on such occasions, full of gratitude, towards Him who supplies our wants."[223] "The very heathen were so sensible of the propriety and obligation of this duty, as enjoined by the law of nature, that, to a great extent, they steadily made libations to their gods, before their meals, as an acknowledgment of their indebtedness to them for their daily food."[224] "Of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, it is expressly recorded that (contrary to a fashion now prevailing) he never did eat of any thing, but he first prostrated himself, and offered thanks to the Supreme Lord of Heaven."[225]

Times of family affliction should also be taken advantage of, for humbling our souls before God, and committing ourselves to his fatherly care and all-wise disposal. Such seasons are peculiarly favourable for strengthening religious impressions where they already exist, and producing them where they are yet wanting. Accordingly, the apostle says, "Is any sick among you? let him

---

220 Mark viii. 6, vi. 41; John vi. 23.

221 Acts xxvii. 35.

222 Rom. xiv. 6; 1 Cor. xiv. 17.

223 Count Struensee, in Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 159.

224 Dwight's Theology, 1 Thess. v. 17.

225 Seed's Serm., Rom. xii. 12.

call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him."[226]

When several families, or individuals, can agree to meet together at particular times for devotional purposes, such opportunities likewise should be zealously improved. Of this kind of prayer we have an instance in the history of the persecution which Herod began against the church, when he "killed James with the sword," and "put Peter in prison."[227] While the apostle remained in prison, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him;" and when the angel of the Lord had delivered him, and he had come "to the house of Mary, the mother of John," he found that "many were" there "gathered together praying." Such religious meetings, when properly conducted, are certainly well calculated to cherish pious impressions. "If we pray among a select society of Christians, we draw near unto God with holy boldness, something like what we use in our duties of secret worship; we have reason to take more freedom among those that are fellow-saints, and whose hearts have felt many of the same workings with our own, and we may often be made a means, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, to raise the faith and joy of others."[228] "It would be well if Christians were more accustomed than they are to sanctify their occasional meetings by prayer, and to meet also for the purpose of uniting in prayer, to obtain those blessings which they need."

---

[226] James v. 14.
[227] Acts xii. 2, 4, 5, 12.
[228] Watts's Guide to Prayer, p. 59.

"Persons who belong to several families may and ought to meet on these occasions,"[229] for their common good.

"Those who neglect the worship of God in their families lie (awful thought!) under the displeasure of the Almighty, under the frown of the Most High. Observe what is said, 'Pour out,'[230] or thou wilt pour out, 'thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the *families* that *call not* upon thy name.' Now, if the heathen and their families are to be thus punished, judge you what will become of those families, in a Christian land, living as heathens, without regard to God and his worship."[231] Sodom and Gomorrah will rise up in the day of judgment against them.

"Call," then, "thy family together, daily and duly, to worship God with thee. Woe be unto thee if thou be found among the families that call not upon God's name! Let the morning and evening sacrifice of solemn prayer be daily offered up in all your families."[232] "Think not your house furnished or complete till you have reared in it an altar to the Lord; till that worship is established in it which he graciously approves. Morning and evening assemble your family together to solicit his blessing."[233] "It is the business of every man, within the compass of his abilities, to promote the honour of God, and, consequently, of every head of a family, to warn those that are beneath him with a sense of religion, and to see that nothing, as far as the sphere of his power extends, be hid from the heat thereof. If ever you

---

[229] Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 166, 170.

[230] Jer. x. 25. [231] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 149.

[232] Alleine's Alarm, pp. 153, 188.

[233] Mrs. Taylor's (of Ongar) Hints, p. 148.

would have your children to be dutiful and your servants faithful, if ever you desire your small community here should join you hereafter with the great congregation of men and angels in one chorus to their Maker, be sure to cultivate the spot of ground committed to your care, teach them to look up to God in every step of their conduct."[234] "If you would not be guilty of bringing ruin on immortal souls; if you wish to have the blessing of them who are ready to perish forever to come upon you; if you desire that your children and servants should be pious and happy; if you would have your whole domestic society blessed, let your household be daily consecrated by fervent prayer to Almighty God."[235]

Let every one of us who has the charge of a famliy act upon this advice. It applies, as God's command and the very nature of the duty do, to all heads of families in all stations and professions in life. No place nor calling in society exempts any one from the duties of godliness; for God is higher than the highest, and will not allow the heads of communities, however exalted, any more than the members, to neglect to do him honour with impunity. Let us not, then, imagine a vain thing against the Lord, but seek him truly in all our dwellings.

Frequency and perseverance in God's worship likewise include

Private Prayer.

This duty ought to be attended to at all times and in all places. In society and in solitude, in light and in darkness, in the midst of our daily employments and in

---

[234] Seed's Serm. on Rom. xii. 12.

[235] Walker's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 20.

the hours of our rest, as well as in public and family prayer, our souls should be holding converse with our unseen but ever present Benefactor. In all such situations there are "intervals of mental engagement for devout thoughts and aspirations. No restraint, no society, no interruption, can wholly forbid access to a Friend ever present and invisible, to whom all hearts are open. If we could happily so control our minds that they should turn and ascend ever, in our unclaimed moments, to the best objects of meditation and desire, then the most conscientious economists of time would not have to reckon those portions of it lost in which they had resorted to no visible employ."[236]

"True and acceptable worship does not depend upon the particular time, or place, or posture, or company, or language, in which it may be performed. It may be offered in silence and secret, beyond the reach of human eye or ear. Even when the sincere and fervent prayer of a truly devout man is offered in public, still its most essential part must be in secret, must be unseen, and must be known only to the great Searcher of hearts."[237] On this account it is that God tells us that he looketh to the heart,[238] and desires us to give him our hearts;[239] and that our Saviour instructs us, when we pray, to enter into our closets, and, when we have shut our door, to pray to our Father who is in secret, and sees in secret, and will reward us openly.[240]

On all this it may be observed that "the privacy of prayer is the great thing which is here enforced. Poor

[236] Sheppard's Thoughts, p. 211.

[237] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 6.

[238] 1 Sam. xvi. 7. [239] Prov. xxiii. 26. [240] Matt. vi. 6.

persons, who have but one apartment, may enter into the spirit of this direction by praying wherever they can be retired. Isaac's closet was a field.[241] He went out to meditate in the field at even-tide.[242] Hannah's prayer was in the temple,[243] but so secret, that Eli misunderstood and reproved her. The Psalmist communed with his own heart upon his bed,[244] and meditated on God in the night-watches.[245] He also prayed evening, morning, and at noonday, seven times a day. Hezekiah, in his illness, also upon his bed, turned his face to the wall and prayed.[246] Daniel had his closet in his own dwelling,[247] whither he retired from the bustle of business, and kneeled three times a day and prayed. Our Saviour went up into a mountain apart to pray, and was there alone.[248] Peter offered up his devotions on a house-top;[249] and Paul, in a state of blindness and helplessness, prayed in the house of a stranger.[250] And all these were accepted.

Brainerd, who laboured so zealously for the conversion of the American Indians, and whose diary gives evidence of his extraordinary piety, often "withdrew into the woods to pour out his burdened soul to God."[251] His habits of secret prayer were such, indeed, that his closet might be said to have been in every place where he himself was present for a time. In the battle of Oudenarde, in 1708, Colonel Blackadder was an instance of one who had acquired, and could exercise, a habit of prayer in

---

241 Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 55.
242 Gen. xxiv. 63.
243 1 Sam. i. 13.
244 Ps. iv. 4.
245 Ps. lxiii. 6.
246 Isa. xxxviii. 2.
247 Dan. vi. 10.
248 Matt. xiv. 23.
249 Acts x. 9.
250 Acts ix. 11.
251 Edwards's Life of Brainerd, 1749, p. 122.

all situations, however distracting and unfavourable to devotion. "Throughout the whole course of it," said he, "I was constantly engaged, sometimes in prayer, sometimes in praise, sometimes for the public, sometimes for myself."[252]

The Duke of Marlborough, too, the great general under whom that battle was fought, was accustomed, through all the difficulties and dangers of his negotiations and campaigns, to put his trust in God and look up to him for support and direction; "for Providence," said he, "makes the wheel go round."[253] What his private feelings were might be gathered, though we had no evidence, but from these words, in one of his letters which refer to the taking of Ghent, and the finishing of the campaign of 1708: "As the hand of the Almighty is visible in this whole matter, I hope her Majesty will think it due to him to return public thanks;" on which his biographer remarks, "He never failed to do so after victory."[254] Private piety must have prompted this.

This reminds us of similar sentiments, manifested in a similar way, in the late unrivalled naval commander, Lord Viscount Nelson. After the battle of the Nile, his emotions of piety were so strong that he "sent orders through the fleet to offer up thanksgivings, in every ship, for the victory with which Almighty God had blessed his Majesty's arms;"[255] and before he commenced the battle of Trafalgar, in which he fell, he "retired to his cabin and wrote the following prayer:

---

[252] Crichton's Life of Colonel Blackadder, p. 134.

[253] Life of Marlborough, abridged, 1822, p. 27.

[254] Ibid. p. 72.

[255] Life of Nelson, abridged, 1830, p. 112.

May the great God, whom I worship, grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious victory, and may no misconduct in any way tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British fleet! For myself, individually, I commit my life to Him that made me; and may his blessing alight on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully! To him I resign myself, and the just cause which is intrusted to me to defend. Amen, Amen, Amen."[256]

Sir Matthew Hale took every opportunity of private communion with God. It is said that even on the bench his mind habitually turned to God, and poured out its feelings before him, during the intervals of pleading at the bar, which took place between the different causes that came on to be tried by him.

"Of Socrates, it is said that his life was full of prayers and addresses to God;"[257] and many others of the best heathens were also remarkable for their attention to the duty of private devotion.

The most eminent Christian divines have always been exemplary in this department of worship. "Luther, the great Reformer, regularly employed three of the best hours of every day in the exercises of devotion."[258] No man, indeed, was ever great in religious and moral excellence without much private worship.

"The good man, whatever his situation or circumstances, whatever his occupation or profession may be, will daily recommend himself and all his concerns to the

---

[256] Life of Nelson, abridged, 1830, pp. 234, 235.

[257] Seed's Serm., Rom. xii. 12.

[258] Bowdler's Tracts, p. 258.

divine blessing."[259] Experience teaches him the necessity and advantage of it. "Nothing," said a most exemplary believer, "has a more pernicious influence on my spiritual state than being deprived of opportunity for private devotion. When I begin the day with God, I am usually strengthened for its duties and trials."[260] "Boerhaave attributed his strength and cheerfulness to the habit of devoting one full hour every morning to secret prayer."[261] Of the Reverend John Eliot, who, like Brainerd, laboured so zealously for the conversion of the American Indians, it was said that "prayer was his delight. In this respect, he led a life of intimate communion with God. It was not merely his daily practice to pray to his Father in secret, but he frequently devoted whole days to the exercises of devotion. He thought that when we have any great things to accomplish, the best policy is to work by an engine of which the world sees nothing."[262] It was the testimony of another pious man, that "had we spent more of our time in conversing with God when we were alone, we might have attained many sweet trophies and fruits of victory which now we have only in hope and expectation. Of all the weapons that almost a Christian taketh to resist temptation, this is most effectual."[263]

It is admitted, by all competent judges, that "secret prayer is the grand means of maintaining communion with God and keeping alive the power of religion in the

---

[259] Fothergill's Serm., Prov. iii. 5, 6.

[260] Mrs. Huntington's Memoirs, 15th June, 1813.

[261] Bowdler's Tracts, p. 257.

[262] Pike's True Happiness, p. 82.

[263] Gray's Sermons on the Spiritual Warfare, ed. 1832, p. 17.

soul. Without this, the others degenerate into formality, and men continue devoid of life, strength, and comfort in the midst of them. Occasional ejaculatory petitions, also, are a blessed addition to stated seasons of retirement;"[264] for, "were we acquainted with the way of intermixing holy thoughts, ejaculatory eyings of God, in our ordinary ways, it would keep the heart in a sweet temper all the day long, and have an excellent influence on all our ordinary actions and holy performances, at those times when we apply ourselves solemnly to them; whereas, without this, our praying morning and evening looks but as a formal visit, not delighting in that constant converse which yet is our happiness and honour and makes all estates sweet."[265] This kind of prayer is called for, too, by the constantly varying circumstances of our situation; for, "besides general, every private Christian finds particular matter of prayer suggested, from his own peculiar trials, from the changing frame of his own mind, and from the appointments of God's providence in his external state."[266]

Further, "private prayer is recommended for the sake of the following advantages. Private wants cannot always be made the subject of public prayer," and, therefore, must be dealt with in the "private exercises of devotion. Private prayer is generally more devout and earnest than the share we are capable of taking in joint acts of worship. Private prayer, in proportion as it is usually accompanied with more actual thought and reflection of the petitioner's own, has a greater tendency

[264] Scott's Essays, pp. 391, 392.
[265] Archbishop Leighton on 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.
[266] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 263.

than other modes of devotion to revive and fasten upon the mind the general impressions of religion. Reflections gain admittance which overwhelm for a season all others, and leave, when they depart, a solemnity upon the thoughts that will seldom fail in some degree to affect the conduct of life." [267]

Impressed with such views as these respecting the benefits of private devotion, many distinguished laymen, in all ages, have agreed in recommending it to the practice of those in whose welfare they have felt themselves most deeply interested.

The Earl of Strafford, just before his execution, gave the following advice to his son: "Serve God diligently, morning and evening, and recommend yourself unto him, and have him before your eyes in all your ways." The instructions of the Marquis of Argyle to his son contain a similar advice: "Use private prayers, as well as go to the public ordinances." [268] Sir Matthew Hale, in his "Counsels to his Children," gave the following directions on this subject: "Every morning, and every evening, upon your knees, humbly commend yourselves to the Almighty God in prayer. This will be a certain means to bring your mind into a right frame, to procure you comfort and blessing, and to prevent thousands of inconveniences and mischiefs to which you will be otherwise subjected." [269] In Dr. Gregory's "Legacy to his Daughters," a book which displays much knowledge of human nature, and of what it requires to support its weakness, we meet with similar sentiments: "Be punc-

[267] Paley's Moral Philosophy, b. v. chap. 4, sec. 1.

[268] Marquis of Argyle's Instructions to his Son, in Br. Test, p. 316.

[269] Sir Matthew Hale's Counsels to his Children, Letter I.

tual in the stated performance of your private devotions, morning and evening. If you have any sensibility or imagination, this will establish such an intercourse between you and the Supreme Being as will be of infinite consequence to you in life. It will communicate an habitual cheerfulness to your tempers, give a firmness and steadiness to your virtue, and enable you to go through all the vicissitudes of human life with propriety and dignity." [270]

"Though prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night, yet," said Feltham, "I hold it more needful in the morning than when our bodies do take their repose. For, howsoever sleep be the image or shadow of death (and when the shadow is so near the substance cannot be far off), yet a man at rest in his chamber is like a sheep impenned in the fold, subject only to the unavoidable and immediate hand of God; whereas in the day, when he roves abroad in the open and wide pastures, he is then exposed to many more unthought-of accidents, that contingently and casually come in the way. Besides, the morning to the day is as youth to the life of a man: if that be begun well, commonly his age is virtuous; otherwise God accepts not the latter service, when his enemy joys in the first dish." [271] "Secret prayer holds such an eminent place among the duties and privileges of a saint, that he cannot neglect it without offending God and injuring the interests of his soul." [272]

---

[270] Gregory's Legacy, pp. 17, 18.

[271] Feltham's Resolves, 67, Br. Test. 310.

[272] Gilfillan on the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, ed. 10th p. 57.

As it is thus of the utmost importance to begin the day with prayer, so it is of importance to enter on every business of any consequence in the same way. "Whenever we set up any great and weighty business, we must be sure to follow our Saviour's steps, in setting some time apart, proportionably to the business we undertake, wherein to ask God's counsel, and desire his direction and blessing in the most serious and solemn manner that possibly we can."[273] "If God's direction and assistance be necessary to the right ordering of our steps and the happy issue of our undertakings, then let each of us, before we engage in any undertaking, at least of moment, not only implore his favour, but justify our hopes of it, by first assuring our hearts before him."[274]

"Extraordinary prayers are to be offered up when any particular occasion occurs, such as great danger threatening us, or any remarkable calamity hanging over us, or when we are induced to pray by the impulse of devotion. Here any time is suitable; but ostentation must be avoided, and therefore we must pray, not publicly, but privately, at home, unless a clear call of necessity require the contrary."[275] Also, "whenever we are successful in any important concern, and are especially prospered, supported, or comforted; whenever we, or ours, are delivered from trouble or want, pain or sickness; whenever we escape from peculiar temptations, are placed in safety, and furnished with strength, peace, hope, and joy, with the peculiar blessings of Christian

---

[273] Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts, p. 291.

[274] Dr. Fothergill's Serm., Prov. iii. 5, 6.

[275] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 28, sec. 5.

fellowship, the rectification of our views, and the improvement of our religious affections; we are especially summoned to the duties of prayer and thanksgiving."[276] Every thing in our state, whether prosperous or adverse, should stir up our hearts to draw near to God in secret devotion.

"In every joy that crowns my days,
In every pain I bear,
My heart shall find delight in praise
Or seek relief in prayer."[277]

"Respecting the time to be allotted to prayer, no general rule can be given. Many have the command of their whole time; and from them more is reasonably expected. Others, as servants, who have hardly any time that they can call their own, are yet bound to redeem some for God."[278] "It not being positively determined how often we are to perform this duty, it must be left to the discretion of every person to decide this question for himself. Those who have the advantages of easy circumstances and much leisure are to look upon themselves bound to consecrate a larger share of their time to the immediate service of God. But if the circumstances his providence has allotted us in this world be such that we cannot, without prejudice to the necessary business of our lawful callings, retire so often as we would otherwise do, the maxim which the apostle hath laid down in another case will hold equally true in this: 'if there be a willing mind, it is accepted accord-

---

[276] Dwight's Theology, Serm. on 1 Thess. v. 17.
[277] Helen Maria Williams.
[278] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 111.

ing to that a man hath,[279] and not according to that he hath not.'"[280]

The obligation and usefulness of frequent and persevering private prayer being thus so manifest, it must follow as an unavoidable consequence that none can neglect it and be safe.

---

[279] 2 Cor. viii. 12.

[280] Hele's Offices of Private Devotion, ed. 2d, pref. p. 22.

CHAPTER V.

BY WHAT MEANS MAY WE LEARN TO PRAY, IF YET STRANGERS TO THAT DUTY, OR IMPROVE IN IT IF WE HAVE ALREADY LEARNED?

In many cases of sudden danger and deep affliction, nature teaches even the most irreligious to pray. Our wants, at some time or other, make every one of us pray We only require to feel our necessities, and know where to apply for relief, to be able to pray. But it is the Spirit of God alone that can impart this feeling and knowledge to our minds so as to enable us to pray *aright*. "A mere natural man, upon the sense of any present want or danger, may apply himself unto this duty for remedy (as the mariners in Jonah), this being a common instinct of nature. But to perform it acceptably, either for the matter or the manner, this is a business of much greater difficulty. The Spirit of God must be our guide and assistant. He must[1] help our infirmities, and make intercession for us: not that the Holy Ghost is our mediator of intercession; that is properly the office of the Son; but because the Spirit of God does excite our hearts to prayer, and infuse into us holy desires, stirring us up and instructing us in this duty." Hence it is "one of his peculiar titles to be styled the Spirit of supplication, because of that special influence which he

[1] Rom. viii. 26.

hath in the bestowing of this gift."[2] "By him we have access to the Father."[3] He "teacheth us all things,"[4] and "guideth us into all truth,"[5] and by him dwelling in our hearts we cry, "Abba, Father."[6]

But, though true and acceptable prayer be the gift of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be obtained in any way but as his gift, yet the Spirit, and this gift also, as his inseparable attendant, we are assured, will be given to them that ask him[7] and are willing[8] to receive them in the manner which infinite wisdom has seen fit to appoint. None, therefore, but those who will not ask this gift may want it. Hence, to obtain and improve it, we must evidently ask and depend upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. "We *must pray* that we may be *able* to pray."[9] Putting ourselves thus entirely under his direction, and diligently exercising our intellectual and moral powers on the various means which he has put within our reach, we may learn to pray, if we have not yet learned, or improve, if we have learned. The same means which help us to the attainment of prayer likewise help us to make progress in it.

1. Of these means, one is frequent and serious meditation. This necessarily implies retirement, and the study of every subject that has any tendency to impress our minds with a sense of what we have received, what we want, and what our God would have us to do. It is a turning of the mind inwardly upon itself, upwardly to

---

[2] Bishop Wilkins on Prayer, pp. 4, 5.
[3] Eph. ii. 18.
[4] John xiv. 26.
[5] John xvi. 13.
[6] Gal. iv. 6.
[7] Luke xi. 13.
[8] Rev. xxii. 17.
[9] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.

God, and outwardly on the works of creation, providence, and redemption, and keeping its contemplations fixed on those views which most deeply affect the heart with devotional feelings and most readily suggest to the imagination devotional ideas.

One who was well experienced in Christian exercises said, "I could not well live without some intervals of retirement. To be continually in bustle and in public is contrary to a Christian life. It keeps me from private duty, from thinking and meditation;"[10] and without these there can be no true piety. "Private devotion cannot be learned by those who have no relish for retirement. The Almighty's voice must be often attended to in the silence of the passions and the secrecy of the soul."[11] To all who neglect this duty the complaint made against the thoughtless Israelites is applicable: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."[12]

"He who would pray must first retire. Meditation, which is the mother of devotion, is the daughter of retirement. They who do not meditate cannot pray. They who do not retire can do neither."[13] "When the mind is intensely fixed upon God by faith and meditation, abstraction of the thoughts from the things of time is the natural consequence; and such an exercise will lead to retirement and secret devotion.[14] The exercises of faith and repentance, all the great and peculiar duties of the religion of Christ, necessarily suppose retirement from

[10] Crichton's Life of Blackadder, p. 164.
[11] Fordyce. [12] Isa. i. 3.
[13] Bishop Horne, in Bickersteth, p. 219.
[14] Gilfillan on the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, ed. 10th, p. 55.

the world. Solitude is the hallowed ground which religion hath, in every age, chosen for her own. There her inspiration is felt, and her secret mysteries elevate the soul. There falls the tear of contrition; there rises towards heaven the sigh of the heart; there melts the soul with all tenderness of devotion, and pours itself forth before Him who made and Him who redeemed it."[15] All this the Psalmist felt when he said, "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue: Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am."[16] "My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."[17]

Our own state should be a constant subject of meditation; for "the proper study of mankind is man."[18] It leads the soul to God, as it did that of the Psalmist, when he was able to say, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies."[19] Hence it has been said that "self-examination precedes prayer, not merely as a pioneer to remove obstacles, but as a skilful general to prescribe and direct the march."[20] On this principle the following directions are founded: "Take the first opportunity you can of retiring in secret, to implore of God his Holy Spirit, to convince you of your depraved and miserable state as a fallen creature, and to give you the knowledge of those things that will make for your eternal peace. They are promised and freely given to beggars,

---

[15] Blair's Serm., Ps. iv. 4.
[16] Ps. xxxix. 3, 4.
[17] Ps. lxiii. 5, 6.
[18] Pope's Essay on Man.
[19] Ps. cxix. 59.
[20] Bowdler's Tracts, p. 260.

but never procured by human merit."[21] "Inquire into thine heart and into thy life; enter into a thorough examination of thyself and all thy ways, that thou mayest make a full discovery. Meditate on the numerousness of thy sins, on their aggravations, their desert, their deformity and defilement. Above all other sins, fix the eye of consideration on the sin of thy nature, and the particular evil that thou art most addicted to."[22] "Fail not, what employment soever you have, every night, as in the presence of God and his holy angels, to pass an inquisition on your soul, what ill it hath done, what good it hath left undone; what slips, what falls, it hath had that day; what temptations have prevailed upon it, and by what means or after what manner. Ransack every corner of thy dark heart; and let not the least peccadillo, or kindness to a sin, lurk there; but bring it forth, bewail it, protest against it, detest it, and scourge it by a severe sorrow. Thus, each day's breach between God and your soul being made up, with more quiet and sweet hope thou mayest dispose thyself to rest. Certainly at last this inquisition, if steadily pursued, will vanquish all customary sins, whatever they may be. I speak it upon this reason, because I presume thou wilt not have the face to appear before God every night confessing the same offence; and thou wilt forbear it, lest thou mayest seem to mock God, or despise him,—which is dreadful but to imagine."[23] A distinguished heathen

[21] Major-General Burns's Who Fares Best, p. 43.

[22] Alleine's Alarm, pp. 129–133.

[23] William Lord Russell's Advice to his Son, in Br. Test. pp. 311, 312.

philosopher of antiquity gave the same advice, when he said,

> "Never let your eyes
> The sweet refreshing of soft slumber taste,
> Till you have thrice severe reflections past
> On th' actions of the day from first to last:
> Wherein have I transgress'd? what done have I?
> What duty unperform'd have I pass'd by?
> This do, this think, to this your heart incline;
> This way will lead you to the life divine." [24]

"Let me first think of my misery without my Saviour's mercy; next of his mercy without my merits; and from the meditation of these two my thanks will spring." [25] "The contemplation of our own worthlessness and God's transcendent excellency and perfection would imprint on our minds such a constant and uninterrupted awe and veneration as is in reality a kind of incessant prayer and reasonable humiliation of the soul before Him who made it." [26]

To have a more distinct and impressive view of all these subjects of reflection, we should continually "search the Scriptures," [27] and "ponder them in our hearts;" [28] for by them alone can we attain to a true knowledge of God and ourselves, and pray aright. Hence we see the propriety of the advice, "Acquaint yourselves with the Scriptures; frequently read the Psalms, where you will find variety of fit expressions and petitions to be used in prayer. Likewise study the Ten Commands; view the

---

[24] Pythagoras's Golden Verses, in Lives of the Philosophers, p. 340.
[25] Feltham's Resolves, p. 77, Br. Test.
[26] Spectator, No. 531.
[27] John v. 39. [28] Luke ii. 19.

large extent and meaning of them, the duties required and sins forbidden in each of them, and they will furnish you with vast matter for confession and petition. Also study the Lord's Prayer, and the import of the several petitions thereof; for there are many petitions wrapt up in every one of them."[29] With all this the divine command agrees, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night;[30]" "think on these things;"[31] "meditate upon them; give thyself wholly to them."[32]

Further, "study well the attributes and works of God, and they will afford manifold matter both for yrayer and praises. View the work of creation; and more especially the work of redemption, the eternal contrivance of it, the glorious Mediator, his nature, his offices, life, death, sufferings, and infinite love, his fulness, graces, offers, promises, and well-ordered covenant; and then I am sure you will not be barren of suitable matter and words for prayer."[33] Nay, "those who love to reflect on the works of the Creator will trace his forming hand not only in the celestial bodies, but in the minutest part of nature They will equally adore a divine intelligence in the spider's web, as in that gravitation which attracts the planetary globes towards the sun their centre."[34] And all the varied wonders of the Almighty's working, between these two extreme points of contrast which they contemplate, will also raise their thoughts and hearts to Him who made and who governs the whole. This was

---

[29] Willison's Sabbath, p. 138.
[30] Josh. i. 8.
[31] Phil. iv. 8.
[32] 1 Tim. iv. 15.
[33] Willison's Sabbath, p. 138.
[34] Sturm's Reflections, Nov. 23.

evidently the effect which such meditations had on the Psalmist's mind, as appears from his own words: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the sun, and the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"[35]

Thus it appears that "meditation is one of the masters requisite to make a man of God;"[36] and if it be of so much importance to devotion, we should certainly avail ourselves of every opportunity to retire and reflect on every subject respecting God, ourselves, and all things around us, most likely to beget religious sentiments in our minds and help us to pour out our souls before God in suitable expressions.

2. Another of the means which help to the attainment and improvement of the gift of prayer, under the Spirit's direction, is the use of forms in our devotions, till we have made sufficient progress to do without them.

Too much has been said and written both for and against the use of forms of prayer. The truth seems to be that, if slavishly adhered to, they cramp and cool the free and fervent spirit of true devotion; whereas, if judiciously used, they become valuable helps to the exciting and expressing of pious emotions. So long as our minds are not sufficiently supplied with religious opinions and affections, and we have not acquired a facility of uttering our sentiments in prayer, we should certainly avail ourselves of such helps, but without confining ourselves entirely to them or making no attempts to utter also thoughts of our own.

---

[35] Ps. viii. 3, 4.

[36] Dr Cotton Mather's Essays, ed. 1825, p. 73.

There are many peculiarities in every one's situation to which private prayer should extend, but to which no general form, composed by another, can allude with sufficient distinctness. At the same time, therefore, that we take every advantage to be obtained from the use of set forms, it is evident that we should never cease to make efforts of our own, however imperfect they may be and unsatisfactory to ourselves. In this, as in every thing in which there are difficulties to be overcome, it is only after many attempts that we can expect to succeed, even with all the helps we can command. But when we feel, after much experience, that we can readily express our emotions without forms, then these forms may be laid aside, having answered the ends for which they were designed. This seems to be the opinion of many competent judges, as the following quotations will show.

"It is generally allowed that, if set forms of prayer are sound, or agreeable to the will of God, they may be used by children, or such as are weak in knowledge. But a perpetual confinement to the best forms will be attended with inconveniences."[37] "They are a help, by which a child may be trained to walk alone; the staff, by which weak Christians may, through the divine blessing, be supported, or the strong, occasionally, when labouring under present deadness or indisposition, be much assisted."[38] "As for weaker Christians and new converts, who have not their hearts enlarged with an ability to express their own wants and desires, it is both lawful and convenient for such to help themselves, not only in their families, but even in their secret perform-

[37] Hall's Gospel Worship, p. 204.

[38] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 63.

ance of this duty, by the use of some good book, or prescribed form, until, by further endeavour and experience, they may attain unto some measure of this gift.

"But for any one to sit down and satisfy himself with his book-prayer, or some other prescribed form, as to go no further, this were still to remain in his infancy, and not to grow up in his new nature. This would be as if a man who had once need of crutches should always afterwards make use of them, and so necessitate himself to a continual impotence."[39] "Forms of prayer, well composed, are useful helps for younger or meaner Christians, or indeed for all persons, when the spirits are low and languishing and the heart in a heavy and cold temper. But to confine a holy soul to a few good expressions written down before, how great an injury would it be to its divine pleasure and profit!"[40]

"So many as can conceive prayer ought to make use of the gift of God; but those who are rude and weaker may begin with a set form of prayer, yet so as they be not sluggish in stirring up in themselves the spirit of prayer."[41] "Next to the divine blessing, nothing contributes more to teach men to pray than frequent practice and use."[42] "Extemporary prayers, if one has the capacity to make them, are laudable and calculated to excite fervour and attention; prescribed formulas cannot take in all particulars and suit all cases. All formulas, however, are not to be condemned or rejected, for all are

[39] Bishop Wilkins's Gift of Prayer, pp. 10, 11.

[40] Watts's Sermons, Job xxiii. 3.

[41] Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, August 24, 1647.

[42] Walker's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 20.

not fit to pray extemporaneously. Some are so unimproved that they cannot express their wants in suitable words."[43]

"It is," therefore, "perfectly proper, and will be wise for all such persons as are in danger of losing their self-possession, or of being otherwise embarrassed, when they are to perform this duty, whether in public or private, to obtain well-written forms of prayer and make them their directories in the performance of this duty. This practice I should recommend, also, so long as the danger of embarrassment should continue, even if it should continue through life. To pray by a form may not be the best method of directing this duty at large, and may yet be the best method which, in given circumstances, will be in our power. It certainly will be far more desirable to use a form of prayer than to pray in an embarrassed and interrupted manner."[44]

But "the truth is, whether there be a form or no form, or whether the form be elegantly or meanly composed, nothing of this availeth to the recommending of our prayers unto God. It is the true and sincere devotion of the heart alone that can make them acceptable unto him; for it is this only that gives life and vigour and a true acceptance to all our religious addresses."[45] Whether we use forms or not, therefore, we should always keep this in view, and try every method in our power to "guard against formality in prayer." For this purpose, "we cannot take a more effectual method than by making its contents arise out

[43] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 26, sec. 8.

[44] Dwight's Theo., Matt. vi. 9-13.

[45] Stackhouse's History of the Bible, book vii chap. 2.

of our present condition; than by making it a simple constant application to God for the supply of our own peculiar wants and necessities."[46]

The best forms which we can use for this end are those contained in the word of God. Of these "the Lord's Prayer stands unrivalled in every circumstance that constitutes the perfection of prayer and the excellence of that species of composition. It is concise, it is perspicuous, it is solemn, it is comprehensive, it is adapted to all ranks, conditions, and classes of men; it fixes our thoughts on a few great important points, and impresses on our minds a deep sense of the goodness and the greatness of that Almighty Being to whom it is addressed."[47] "It is so full and comprehensive, that though a man may pray in other words, and those of great variety, yet every lawful subject of prayer may be reduced to one or other of the petitions which it contains."[48]

Of the many excellent forms in various other parts of the Bible, a great portion is suitable to the circumstances of every one, whatever his condition may be, and well calculated to stir up and help him to express pious emotions. It has, therefore, been said that "a thorough acquaintance with the devotional part of the Psalms, and the petitions contained in other parts of Scripture, and a careful attention to the requests which the sacred writers offered, will be more useful to the serious Christian than all other helps whatever."[49] Nay, "the

[46] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 264.

[47] Bishop Porteus's Lectures on Matthew, No. 7.

[48] Augustine, in Milner's Church History, 1824, vol. ii. p. 450.

[49] Scott's Essays, pp. 392, 393.

sacred flame in the heart cannot be kept burning, holy ejaculations cannot ascend to heaven, without a frequent perusal of the Holy Scriptures and other religious books. The Scriptures are the fuel of meditation, the food of faith, and the life of prayer."[50] Melancthon has left it on record that Luther felt so much benefit from this mean of improvement that he commonly devoted a portion of every day to the solemn recitation of some of the Psalms of David, with which he mingled his own supplications. He said, "Divine wisdom has prescribed some formularies to us, that our minds may be inflamed with devotional feeling in reading them."[51] Another distinguished divine, of a later age, was so much impressed with the same opinion that he gave this advice to all suppliants: "Acquaint yourselves with the Scriptures, frequently read the Psalms, and particularly the 25th, 51st, 86th, 119th Psalms, and others, where you will find variety of fit expressions and petitions to be used in prayer. Take with you these words which the Holy Ghost teacheth: they are the most acceptable words."[52]

The following is another method, recommended to the worshipper, for familiarizing the devotional ideas of the Bible to his mind. "He should collect together and write down such proper adorations, expressions of praise, petitions, and acknowledgments, as he meets with, particularly in reading the Scriptures. He should write them down in any order in which they occur. By this means he will in a short time obtain a large stock, and,

[50] Gilfillan on the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, ed. 10th, p. 55.
[51] Melancthon, in Scott's Contin. of Milner, ed. 2d, p. 503.
[52] Willison's Sabbath, p. 138.

by frequently looking it over and fixing it in his mind, the several things which he has written down will occur to him readily, when he has occasion for them, without his needing to digest them into form beforehand. One thing will suggest another connected with it; and the disposition of his prayers, dictated in this manner by the present temper of his mind, will be more easy and natural than if it had been contrived coolly in his closet."[53]

As to human compositions which may be useful to us as models, "we have good and sound forms of prayer easily procured, as those of Cotterill, Knight Bean, Swete, and Jenks; and short prayers for every morning and evening, by the Religious Tract Society;"[54] to which may be added those by Bickersteth, Malcolm, Venn, Doddridge, Henry, and many others, well calculated to be helps to devotion.

Having so many forms, both in the Bible and in the writings of uninspired men, to help us in our endeavours to obtain and improve in the gift of prayer, and so many testimonies in favour of the use of them, we should be induced to avail ourselves freely of their assistance whenever we feel the want of such helps. If we make the proper use of them, in humble dependence on the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we must succeed. There is, therefore, no excuse for neglecting to seek and cultivate the gift of prayer, for making no attempts to live in devotional habits.

3. A third mean, which the Holy Spirit often employs for conveying the gift of prayer and promoting improve-

---

[53] Gerard's Pastoral Care, part ii. chap. 3, sec. 2.

[54] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 153.

ment in it, is attention, on the part of them that seek it, to the advice and example of those who have had much experience in devotional exercises, and are able and willing to benefit others by communicating the result of their experience to them.

The appointment of an order of men to teach the truths of religion and lead the public devotions of our worshipping assemblies puts it into every one's power to witness and study the way in which those who ought to be best qualified conduct the worship of God, and hence obtain directions and assistance for performing family and private devotions. The setting aside of one day in seven for the public ministrations of that order, and for allowing the influence of their example and admonitions to produce an effect in secret, gives an opportunity to all who are willing to make use of it, to derive much benefit from this provision of divine goodness. Nay, "were it not for this day, on which we assemble together to worship the God of our fathers, the very form of godliness would be exterminated from the face of the earth;"[55] for, "bad as the world is, there is reason to think it would be a thousand times worse if it were not for the institution of the Sabbath, the wisdom and humanity of which can never be sufficiently admired."[56]

In consequence of this appointment, a sense of religion is kept alive in the hearts of those who make the proper use of it; and their influence on others acts as a preservative power to society. In this way, the labours of the ministering servants of God, on the Lord's day, have

---

[55] Logan's Sermons, Rom. xii. 11.

[56] Beattie's Elements, vol. ii. p. 81, Br. Test. p. 324.

a powerful tendency to teach all the language of prayer and praise. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts,"[57] and is expressly appointed for the purpose of training them, "by every rule of heavenly discipline,"[58] to do God's will, of which his worship is a principal part.

The usefulness of ministers in leading men to God in the acts of devotion is implied in the questions, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"[59] The word of God is, no doubt, in the hands of all among us who make any profession of religion, and the reading of it gives us advantages which were unknown to the persons to whom these questions were at first addressed, and which, as appears from the last head, render us utterly inexcusable if we cannot form our thoughts into prayer. But, in addition to all this, we are required to attend to all those instructions in public which illustrate the word, whether in one department of worship or another, as a mean of stirring up pious emotions in our minds and enabling us to express them in the form of prayer. Hence it has been said, "Reading the word and sermons at home is good; but hearing the word preached is the ordinary mean God has appointed and promised to bless for conversion;" and conversion includes, of course, both the spirit and the expression of prayer. It has also been said that "if this be slighted, or prove ineffectual,

---

[57] Mal. ii. 7. [58] Cowper's Task, b. ii.
[59] Rom. x. 14.

no other way can be contrived for it."[60] "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."[61]

"As God will light the world by the sun, and not by himself without it, so will he convert and save men by his ministers, who are the lights of the world.[62] When he hath miraculously humbled Paul,[63] he sendeth him to Ananias; and when he hath sent an angel to Cornelius,[64] it is but to bid him send for Peter."[65] Though both Paul and Cornelius had been accustomed to pray before these directions were given them, yet they were ignorant of Christ, and, consequently, till enlightened by Ananias and Peter, did not know how to pray aright. This also leads us to observe that the private ministrations and conversation of the ministers of the gospel, whether on Sabbath or other days, might be successfully used for helping us to obtain and improve the gift of prayer. By attending to their instructions, when teaching from house to house,[66] we may learn to lift up our souls to God, and glow with all the fervour of devotion, like the disciples, whose hearts burned within them while our Saviour opened the Scriptures to them as they were travelling to Emmaus.[67] This was the effect which Luther's prayers had on the mind of Vitus Theodorus, as he himself described it in a letter to Melancthon: "While I was listening, my soul seemed on fire within me, to hear the man address God so like a friend, and yet with so much

---

[60] Willison's Sabbath, p. 127.
[61] Luke xvi. 31.
[62] Matt. v. 14; Acts xxvi. 17, 18.
[63] Acts ix. 10.
[64] Acts x. 3–6.
[65] Baxter's Call, p. 205.
[66] Acts xx. 20.
[67] Luke xxiv. 32.

gravity and reverence."[68] Hence appears the propriety of the apostolical recommendation, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."[69]

After the example and advice of the ministers of religion, attention should next be paid to the way in which private Christians of experience conduct their family devotions. Here the benefit is reaped principally by the inferior members of families, whose thoughts are solemnized and directed to God, and who are taught by such examples how they ought to worship him in secret. In this point of view it has been said that "the peculiar use of family piety consists in its influence upon servants and the young members of a family."[70] Such of them as make the proper use of the lesson thus laid down to them "naturally feel as if God were always to be worshipped, sought, honoured, and praised, and his blessing were to be implored in every concern, temporal and spiritual."[71]

All, indeed, whether heads or subordinate members of families, may profit much by attending to the devotions of those who are more gifted than themselves in the qualifications for conducting the worship of God. "Those who have the holy fire may be the means of enkindling the sacred flame in others. You would find the prayers of those who can and do pray with freedom and fervency a great help to your own attainment of this

[68] Scott's Continuation of Milner's Church History, p. 77.
[69] Heb. xiii. 7.
[70] Paley's Moral Philosophy, b. v. c. 4.
[71] Dwight's Theology, Eph. vi. 18.

gift."[72] Therefore, "among ministers, and among your fellow-Christians, observe those that have the most edifying gifts, and endeavour to imitate them who are more universally approved of, and the exercise of whose talents is more abundantly blest to excite and maintain the devotion of all their fellow-worshippers."[73]

The society and conversation of pious friends, who are able and willing to give us proper advice, are also of the greatest importance in helping us on in the acquiring and improving of devotional habits. "He who lives and converses frequently and intimately with religious men may ordinarily be expected to become religious. The best emotions which can be felt by the human heart are awakened and reciprocated. The flame which glows in one breast is caught and kindled in another. The light which illuminates one mind sheds its lustre over all the minds by which it is encircled."[74] "They that fear the Lord speak often one to another,"[75] and "say, every one to his neighbour and every one to his brother, What hath the Lord answered, and what hath the Lord spoken?"[76] In this way, they "consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works,"[77] and "sharpen the countenance of each other, as iron sharpens iron."[78] As "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise,"[79] so the "companion of all them that fear the Lord and keep his precepts"[80] shall, by the very influence of association, learn to reverence, obey, and worship God. "The com-

---

[72] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 170.
[73] Watts's Guide, pp. 109, 110.
[74] Dwight's Theology, Prov. xiii. 20.
[75] Mal. iii. 16. [76] Jer. xxiii. 35. [77] Heb. x. 24.
[78] Prov. xxvii. 17. [79] Prov. xiii. 20. [80] Ps. cxix. 63.

munion of saints contributes much to the pleasantness of wisdom's ways. We have many fellow-travellers that quicken one another, by the faithful fellowship they have with one another, as companions[81] in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. It is the will of God that his people should by that means[82] encourage one another and strengthen one another's hands."[83] If, in this manner, "our affections are kept warm, and we use ourselves frequently to speak of the things of religion to men, we shall learn to express ourselves much better about the same divine concerns, when we come before God,"[84] in the acts of devotion.

Hence we see the wisdom of the advice, "Change your company, if it hath hitherto been bad, and join yourselves with those that fear the Lord, and inquire of them the way to heaven. If it may be, converse with lively, active, stirring Christians. But especially have one such for a bosom friend, that will warm you when you are cold, and help to awake you when you drop asleep, and will not comply with you in a declining, lazy, and unprofitable course."[85] For this purpose, the most tried in religion, wherever they can be had, ought to be selected. A pious American clergyman carried this idea so far that he "advised Brained wholly to abandon young company, and associate himself with grave and elderly people."[86] Such a rule as this cannot always be followed, nor would it always be proper, nor dutiful to the young.

---

[81] Rev. i. 9. [82] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

[83] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, pp. 107, 108.

[84] Watts's Guide, p. 78.

[85] Baxter's Call, 1825, p. 205, and Now or Never, 1827, p. 74.

[86] Edwards's Life of Brainerd, p. 4.

But, in general, there is certainly more safety and a greater chance of improvement to be expected from associating with the old than with the young. Therefore "it is your part to commit yourselves to the guidance of the more experienced, and to become wise by the wisdom of those who have gone before you."[87] "Their counsels are not to be rashly despised, inasmuch as, being improved by long experience, they are far to be preferred to the counsels of younger persons."[88] This holds particularly true of godly parents and elder kinsfolk of pious habits, whose desire and constant endeavours are to help younger believers onward to Zion. The divine command, therefore, runs in these terms: "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."[89]

To whom, indeed, can we apply with more confidence, and with a better right to expect success, than to those who are bound to bring us "up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"[90] and to those who are "our guides and acquaintances, with whom we take sweet counsel, and in whose company we walk unto the house of God"?[91] From the affection and disinterested desires of such to do us good, we are entitled to hope for every assistance they can yield us in growing in all godliness of heart and life.

With a view, then, to obtain and increase in the gift of prayer, we should evidently, in humble dependence on the blessing of the Holy Spirit, attend to the directions of God's ministers, and the way in which they and

[87] Blair's Serm., Tit. ii. 6.

[88] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 58, sec. 10.

[89] Prov. xxiii. 22. [90] Eph. vi. 4. [91] Ps. lv. 13, 14.

experienced Christians conduct divine worship, and endeavour to imitate their example, so far as it is applicable to our circumstances, and, also, frequent, as much as possible, the society, and be careful to benefit by the conversation and advice, of all truly religious persons to whom we may have freedom of access, especially the aged and most tried, who are most able to instruct and direct us.

4. To give full effect to all the foregoing means of obtaining and improving the gift of prayer, it is particularly necessary to do what we can, in humble dependence on the Spirit, to guard against every kind of sin.

Sin and true devotion stand directly opposed to each other. To indulge, therefore, in any known iniquity, is to unfit the soul for the exercises of piety, and to keep it at a distance from God. "That one may pray aright, he must pray with a pure heart, and regulate his actions by the divine commands."[92] "The allowed practice of any sin is utterly inconsistent with devotional feelings. If you live in habitual sin, you cannot at the same time enjoy communion with God. His Spirit is grieved, and withdraws his influence. Any sin indulged raises those fears, doubts, disorders, and tumults in the mind which make it averse to, and incapable of, fervent affectionate prayer. Immoderate or unnecessary indulgence of ease, appetite, sleep, &c., are serious obstacles to the attaining of a devotional spirit. Worldly-mindedness, or the indulgence of any sin in the heart, gradually unfits us for approaching Him who is of purer eyes than to behold

[92] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sec. 1.

iniquity."[93] "The care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word;"[94] for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God."[95]

"When we pray, we must pray in the spirit of penitence. We must be animated by a hatred of sin; for 'if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.'[96] We must have a sincere and decided and paramount affection for holiness; for without this we could not fix our minds with comfort, or with hope, on Him whom we pretended to worship. If conscious that we were 'enemies to God in our minds, by wicked works,' and that we were persevering in our enmity, notwithstanding all that he had done to subdue it, we could not possibly cherish towards him one devotional sentiment or utter one sincere supplication. It becomes us, therefore, it is requisite for us, to be holy, that we may pray to God as we ought."[97] Hence appears the propriety of the advice, "Before you offer unto God the sacrifice of your souls, you must, if you are true Christians, renounce sin, and all those wicked lusts whereof ye have made idols unto yourselves. Bury them deep in the earth."[98]

"We are not in danger of quenching or grieving the Spirit by the humble and diligent use of the means of grace; but there is much danger of losing this heavenly guest by the indulgence of any sin, and especially of any sensual iniquity."[99] "He cannot dwell in polluted hearts, and in temples that are not his own."[100] "A

---

[93] Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 203, 217.
[94] Matt. xiii. 22. [95] James iv. 4. [96] Ps. lxvi. 18.
[97] Dr. Andrew Thomson's Lectures, Ps. v. 1–8.
[98] Drelincourt on Death, ed. 1813, p. 197.
[99] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 40.
[100] Logan's Serm., Luke xi. 13.

longing after sensual pleasures is a dissolution of the spirit of a man, and makes it loose, soft, and wandering, unapt for noble, wise, or spiritual employments."[101] "A life of dissipation, of gaming, of pleasure, of public places, puts an essential obstacle in the way of prayer. It places in the heart, in the imagination, in the senses, an invincible disgust at prayer."[102]

Count Struensee "acknowledged that voluptuousness had been his chief passion, and had contributed most to his moral depravity."[103] So true it is that "fleshly lusts war against the soul."[104] "Debauchery and excess greatly contribute to destroy all the susceptible delicacy with which nature usually furnishes the heart; and, in the general extinction of our better qualities, it is no wonder that so pure a sentiment as that of piety should be one of the first to expire. When the heart is tied down to the earth by lust and avarice, it is not extraordinary that the eye should be seldom lifted up to heaven."[105] "Living in any known sin," indeed, "is a grand impediment to a heavenly conversation."[106] "How necessary is it that souls worshipping so pure a God should be purged from all the earthly dregs of impure affections!"[107] Of this the enlightened among the ancient heathens were aware, as we learn from Cicero: "Let men approach the gods with purity; let them prac-

---

[101] Bishop Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living, ed. 1827, p. 43.
[102] Massillon's Sermons, Matt. xv. 22.
[103] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 105.
[104] 1 Pet. ii. 11.
[105] V. Knox's Essays, p. 90.
[106] Baxter's Saint's Rest, p. 183.
[107] Archbishop Leighton on Ps. cxxx. 2.

tise piety; for on him that doth otherwise God himself will be the avenger."[108]

We have it on the highest of all authority that "our sins make God hide his face from us,"[109] and "cover himself with a cloud, that our prayer may not pass through."[110] He says by his servant Isaiah (i. 15.), "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." He alone who "has washed his hands in innocency can compass the altar of God."[111] He alone who "hath clean hands and a pure heart can ascend into the hill of God, and stand in his holy place."[112] Hence we are exhorted to "take heed to ourselves, lest at any time our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life;"[113] to "lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,"[114] and if, when "we bring our gift to the altar, we remember that any one hath ought against us, to go and first be reconciled to him, and then come and offer our gift."[115]

In our endeavours, then, to obtain the gift of prayer and improve in the exercise of it, it is evidently indispensably necessary to guard as much as possible against all kinds of iniquity, especially sensual habits, worldly-mindedness, dissipation, excess, and evil affections of the soul; inasmuch as these deaden the spiritual sensibilities, check religious sentiments, and never allow the feelings to flow in the sanctified channel of devotion.

---

[108] Cicero de Nat. Deo., lib. ii. c. 8.
[109] Isa. lix. 1, 2.
[110] Lam. iii. 44.
[111] Ps. xxvi. 6.
[112] Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.
[113] Luke xxi. 34.
[114] 1 Tim. ii. 8.
[115] Matt. v. 23, 24.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT ARE THE PRETENCES WHICH ARE MOST COMMONLY USED FOR NEGLECTING PRAYER.

It must now be evident that none can be justified in neglecting a duty which is urged upon us by so many and so powerful considerations as the foregoing pages contain. All that can be advanced by the prayerless in attempting to justify themselves can amount to nothing more than plausible sophistries or mere pretences. And yet many such pitiable expedients are every day used by the ungodly to excuse themselves to those around them, and to their own conscience, for living without God in the world. Of this the few following instances may be taken as a specimen.

1. The attributes of God are often mentioned as a pretence for neglecting the duty of praying to him.

Because God is almighty and unchangeable, and his purposes, therefore, are irreversible, many argue that it is absurd and vain to pray; and because he is omniscient and infinitely wise and good, others argue that he will give us what is best for us, whether we pray or not, and that, consequently, prayer is unnecessary.

"Chubb supposes it a thing certain that God doth not fulfil our requests by granting what we pray for, since things will go on in their natural course whether we pray to God or not."[1] "Lord Rochester was persuaded

[1] Leland's Deistical Writers, ed. 5th, vol. i. p. 217.

that there neither was a special providence about human affairs, nor that prayers were of much use, since that was to suppose God a weak being like ourselves, who could be overcome with entreaties and importunities."[2]

In answer to all this, it has been observed that "it is true that God's counsels are all fixed and immovable but it can by no means be inferred from this that the business of prayer is vain and needless. The Great Author of nature and of all things does nothing in vain. He instituted not his law, and (if I may so express it) the art of praying, as a vain and insignificant thing, but endowed it with a wonderful efficacy for producing the greatest and happiest consequences. And certainly, though the good man does not always obtain the very thing that he asks, yet pure and right petitions never ascend in vain; but he who presents them either obtains the things he asks, or receives, instead of what is pleasing, what is truly profitable, and, instead of the things that he wishes for, those that are upon the whole the fittest and best, and that in the fittest and best time."[3] "It is a mistake," however, "to suppose God can be operated upon or moved by our requests, as a fellow-creature is. The alteration is not in the Giver, but in the petitioner, who by asking in sincerity fulfils the condition on which the divine bounty is invariably and unchangeably administered."[4] "The efficacy of prayer lies not in working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourselves; in begetting or improving right dispositions of heart, and thereby making us fit

[2] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 36.
[3] Archbishop Leighton, Ps. cxxx. 2.
[4] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. pp. 39, 40.

subjects of the divine mercy. Hence prayer has been appointed by God as an instrument for improving our nature, and is required on our part as a condition of receiving his favours."[5] "It is enough that it moveth us and fitteth us to receive his mercies, and that God hath made it necessary to the effect, and a means, or condition, without which he will not give the blessing."[6]

"It is true, nothing we can say can have any influence on God, or move him to show us mercy; but it may have an influence on ourselves, and help to put us in a frame fit to receive mercy;"[7] for it is certain that "God would have never commanded us to pray, if he did not mean to bestow a good issue to that practice."[8] "The very circumstance of God's commanding you to pray implies in it an assurance that he will listen to your prayer;"[9] and "it hath pleased him, as we learn distinctly from his revealed declarations, to connect the reception of spiritual blessings with prayer; the real welfare and prosperity of man with supplication to the author of every good and every perfect gift. They are as strictly united as knowledge is with study, or the continuance of life with the use of food. It is no more philosophical to doubt of the efficacy and consequence of the one means than of the other."[10]

"If the predetermination and immutability of God render it improper for men to pray, because their prayer

---

[5] Dr. Blair's Sermons, Ps. lxv. 2.

[6] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, p. 103.

[7] Henry on Prayer, Ps. v. 3.

[8] Barrow's Sermon's, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

[9] Dr. Andrew Thomson's Sermons, Matt. vii. 7.

[10] Sheppard's Thoughts on Private Devotion, ed. 6th, pp. 19, 20.

cannot change his purposes, then the same things must render it equally improper for men to plough, or sow, or reap, or make any other effort for any end whatever. All these, without the divine blessing, will be in vain, and can no more change the purpose of God than prayer. With just the same propriety and force may the farmer say, It is vain for me to plough, or sow, or reap, since, if God has determined to give me a crop, I shall have it without either of these efforts. This opinion is equally contradictory to Scripture and common sense." [11]

"When God established the course of the universe, and arranged all the events which must come to pass in it, he paid attention to all the circumstances which should accompany each event, and particularly to the dispositions, to the desires and prayers, of every intelligent being. And the arrangement of all events was disposed in perfect harmony with all these circumstances. When, therefore, a man addresses to God a prayer worthy of being heard, it must not be imagined that such a prayer came not to the knowledge of God till the moment it was formed. That prayer was already heard from all eternity; and if the Father of mercies deemed it worthy of being answered, he arranged the world expressly in favour of that prayer, so that the accomplishment should be a consequence of the natural course of events." [12] "Were the question put to a believer why he prays, or how he can hope that his prayers can have any efficacy in determining the will and the procedure of Him, all whose purposes are unchangeable and all

---

[11] Dwight's Theology, Job xxi. 15.

[12] Euler's Letters to a German Princess, 1, 393, in Br. Test. p. 308.

whose works are known to him from the beginning, he might satisfy himself with replying that God has authorized and commanded him to pray, with the express promise that the prayer of faith, offered up in the name of Christ, shall be heard and answered, and that he can safely leave it, therefore, with God himself to provide for the fulfilment of his promise, in perfect consistency with the immutability of his counsels."

But there is enough in Scripture to enable him to go much further. "He is there warranted to maintain that prayer is most deeply concerned in the determination of all the purposes of God concerning his people; that every believing supplication that has been, or ever will be, offered up, was as much the subject of divine foreknowledge as any other action or event that was to take place in the moral world; and that the same infinite wisdom which so arranged the constitution of things as to provide for what we would call contingencies, and to determine the bearing and the effect of every one event upon another, did by that same arrangement make provision also for meeting every prayer of faith with a special and determinate act of his will."[13] Therefore, though

> "Prayer, against his absolute decree,
> No more avails than breath against the wind,"[14]

yet, when not at variance with his purposes and the directions he has given us of its exercise, he crowns it with success, which often fills the soul with wonder; for, "verily, whatsoever we ask in Christ's name, believing we shall receive."[15]

---

[13] Dr. Gordon's Sermons, Dan. iv. 20–23.

[14] Milton's Paradise Lost, b. xi. line 311.

[15] John xvi. 23.

"That from us aught should ascend to heaven,
So prevalent as to concern the mind
Of God, high-blessed, or to incline his will,
Hard to belief may seem; yet this will prayer." [16]

There can be no force, therefore, in the objection which is founded on the immutability of God and the consequent unchangeableness of his purposes. A conclusion of a directly opposite nature is the only one to which reason and revelation can conduct us. What his *secret* purposes are we know not, and it concerns us not. But this we know, that one of his *revealed* purposes is that every individual on earth, without exception, whom he will recognize at last as his, and who shall see his face in peace, *must* be a child of prayer. This is just as irreversible a purpose as any other decree in the divine counsels, and a purpose, too, as clearly announced in Scripture as language can express it. To attempt, then, to set aside a purpose so manifest and so immovable, because there are other purposes that our weak minds cannot comprehend, in all their relations to our state,—to neglect a clear and positive *duty*, about which no sensible person can have any doubt, because the Almighty Ruler of all has devised a fixed plan of government, without explaining its different parts so as to satisfy every silly infidel or doubting inquirer, is so impious, and so inconsistent with common sense, that it is hardly conceivable how any one who is not a knave or a fool could be guilty of it.

The same remarks apply, in a great measure, to the objection drawn from the knowledge, wisdom, and goodness of God. On this ground "the profane attempt to

[16] Milton's Paradise Lost, b. xi. line 143.

vindicate themselves in a neglect of prayer, by pretending to sublimer ideas of true religion than those who are governed by the simple declarations of God's word. The Supreme Being," say they, "knows all things: what need is there, then, for us to tell him our wants? He is loving unto every man: therefore he will give us, without our request, that which is, upon the whole, best for us: he lays not a stress upon our making many prayers; pure and undefiled religion before him, is to do justice and love mercy.

"From the confidence of this assertion, one would be tempted to suppose that the persons who make it perfectly knew the mind of God,—when, in fact, it is not probable that they should have any just knowledge of it. As skill in human sciences is only to be acquired by application to them, so the knowledge of God is only to be obtained by prayer, and by meditation on his own revelation of himself; both which these totally neglect. Therefore, professing themselves wise, they betray the most stupid ignorance in these objections against the necessity of prayer. If indeed we were called upon to pray, in order to inform God of what he knew not before, or to excite in him a benevolence to which he was a stranger till our petitions gave it birth, then the objections would be as pertinent and conclusive as they are common in the mouths of the profane. But how vain do they appear when it is considered that our very encouragement to pray is the previous assurance that God knows all our wants, and that because he loves us therefore he will hear us!"[17] This was the use which

[17] Venn's Duty of Man, ed. 1824, pp. 268, 269.

our Saviour wished his hearers to make of this view of the divine character, when he said, "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven," &c.[18]

"Can any one believe that our condition would be better if God had no knowledge of our prayers before we presented them, and that he should then be disposed to change in our favour the order of the course of nature? This might well be irreconcilable with his wisdom, and inconsistent with his adorable perfections."[19] Whereas "it may be consistent with his wisdom to withhold his favours till they are asked for, as an expedient to encourage devotion in his rational creation, in order thereby to keep up and circulate a knowledge and sense of their dependence upon him." Besides, "prayer has a natural tendency to amend the petitioner himself, and thus to bring him within the rules which the wisdom of the Deity has prescribed to the dispensation of his favours."[20] One thing is very evident; and that is that thereby "our necessities become well known to ourselves, and hence impress us seriously and make us seek God's aid the more ardently."[21]

"That God knows all our wants, that he knows them more perfectly than ourselves, and that he thus knew them from all eternity, will, it is presumed, be universally admitted. To give him, therefore, any information concerning ourselves, can never be any part of a Christian

[18] Matt. vi. 8, 9.

[19] Euler's Letters, 1, 393, in Br. Test. 309.

[20] Paley's Moral Philosophy, book v. chap. 2.

[21] Piscator on Matt. vi. 8.

prayer. It may be very proper for infinite wisdom to bestow on a humble suppliant that which it would very properly withhold from him who refuses to pray. In the Scriptures we are taught expressly that such is the real system of infinite wisdom and goodness, and that blessings actually descend only as answers to prayers."[22]

If the very attributes of God, then, which are referred to by the ungodly as a justification of their prayerless habits, are thus the strongest encouragement to prayer, it must surely be a very strange perverseness of temper, or blindness, or obliquity of intellect, that can use them as a pretence for neglecting so evident a duty. If it be a duty which He who is infinite in knowledge, wisdom, and goodness has seen fit to command, and render indispensable to our welfare, there can be no ground whatever, connected with any view of the divine nature, on which any excuse, however meagre, can be founded, for not performing it. Whatever the deluded and disaffected may say, the necessity of prayer is incontrovertible, and ought to be anxiously and constantly attended to by every individual, who must give an account at last to God.

2. Another pretence for neglecting prayer is that the mind has often no inclination to it or comfort in it, and, consequently, that it is both unprofitable and improper while the feelings are in this unfavourable state.

This is the old complaint of the godless priests, who said, "Behold, what a weariness is it!"[1] and is reproved by God himself, where he says, by Isaiah (xliii. 22), "Thou hast been weary of me, Israel," and is grounded

[22] Dwight's Theology, Serm. Job ii. 11–15.

[1] Mal. i. 13.

on the natural alienation of the heart from God, and should be resisted; for it "is only to cover one fault with another. Our indisposition is itself criminal, and ought to be corrected."[2] "Nothing is more unrighteous than to estrange ourselves from prayer on account of the disgusts and wanderings of the mind which render it painful and disagreeable to us; for these" often "arise from our lukewarmness and our infidelities, or our being little accustomed to prayer, or the wisdom of God who tries us, and who wishes to purify our heart by withholding for a time the sensible consolations of his Spirit."[3] "When our weariness and unwillingness are such as make us give over our duties, so as to live in the ordinary neglect of them, it is a fearful sign; but when, notwithstanding present discouragements, we hold on in the performance of our duties, and in a humble waiting on God for removing our difficulties, till we are brought to a better frame, this argues well."[4]

When "the prayer is faint and weak, disordered and low, the person is not in full life and health, or else some great temptation oppresses him heavily. The Physician of souls must be looked to for medicine and deliverance. Certainly all is not right; and speedy help should be sought for and applied."[5] "If the attacks of your enemies prevail, you will immediately perceive an insincerity in your prayers. You will find yourself at times wishing the prayer were over, and uttering it rather as a sedative to conscience than as the supreme delight of your soul.

---

[2] Barrow's Sermons, 1 Thess. v. 17.

[3] Massillon's Sermons, Matt. xv. 22.

[4] Alleine's Alarm, p. 239.

[5] Serle's Christian Remembrancer, p. 120.

You will then indeed come like a slave to the altar, and you will be glad of a speedy retreat,"[6] and excuse yourself by saying, "I find no benefit from prayer; I have prayed, and seem no better for it,—nay, rather worse." But you ought to know that, "if you feel more of your guilt and sinfulness, that of itself is an advantage, and should bring you more to the Saviour. This is a vain excuse. Shall the minister give up preaching because his congregation seem to receive no immediate benefit? Shall the husbandman, because the seed just sown in one part of the field has not directly sprung up, not sow the remainder of the field? Let this objection lead you not to neglect your prayers, but to examine their character,"[7] and be more earnest and persevering; for "it is a great mistake" to think "that prayer is lost, or nothing but formality, because we do not find comfort in it, or an immediate effect from it, or pray with so much fervour as we could wish."[8] "It is possible you may gain least when the natural passions are most moved"[9] and you think that you have gained most.

"A piety wholly of fancy goes a short way, if not sustained and confirmed by the truth. It is dangerous to let our fidelity depend upon the feeling dispositions of a heart which is never an instant the same, and upon which every object makes new impressions."[10]

"Without doubt, holy souls dwell at ease: yet we

---

[6] Village Pastor's Advice, pp. 5, 6.

[7] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 23.

[8] Adams's Private Thoughts, p. 253.

[9] Scotch Minister's Assistant, p. 157.

[10] Massillon's Sermons, Matt. xv. 21.

place not religion in raptures and transports."[11] "It is an error to think that perpetual rapture and spiritual joy belong to devotion. Devout feelings admit very different degrees of warmth and exaltation. Some persons, by the degree of their minds, are much more susceptible than others of the tender emotions. But in the midst of still and calm affections devotion often dwells, and, though it produce no transports in the mind, diffuses over it a steady serenity. Devout sensations not only vary in their degree, according to the frame of different tempers, but, even among the best-disposed, suffer much interruption and decay. It were too much to expect that, in the present state of human frailty, those happy feelings should be uniform and constant."[12]

"Be not discouraged though in your holy exercises you have no lively feelings or elevating conceptions. Although they are sometimes enjoyed by many holy persons, yet they are not the essentials of true holiness. Lively feelings depend more on one's natural constitution than many are willing to allow."[13] "Desire and labour more for a high estimation of things spiritual and eternal, and a fixed resolution and an even and diligent endeavour, than for passionate feelings and affections. These latter depend much on the temper of the body, and are not of so great necessity as the former, though excellent in a just degree and season. Be suspicious when you have the warmest and liveliest affections, lest your judgments should be perverted by following when they should lead. It is very common for zeal and strong affections,

[11] Henry's Pleasantness of Religion, p. 39.

[12] Blair's Sermons, Acts x. 2.

[13] Colquhoun on Spiritual Comfort, p. 187.

even to that which is good, to occasion mistakes of the understanding."[14]

But though strong excitements of the animal feelings are not essential to true devotion, yet an ordinary degree of sensibility is certainly encouraging and highly desirable. Therefore, "if you find your heart so very dry and unaffected with the things of religion that you can say nothing at all to God in prayer, that no divine matter occurs to your thoughts, go and fall down humbly before God, and tell him that you can say nothing to him. Plead earnestly for his Spirit, if it be but in the language of sighs and tears; beg that he would never suffer your heart to be so hard, nor your soul to be so empty of divine things. There hath been glorious communion maintained with God, before the end of that season of worship, when, at the beginning of it, the saint could say nothing else but, Lord, I cannot pray."[15] Of this Luther was an example, when "he never gave over praying, till he prayed his heart into the frame he prayed for."[16]

From all this it is evident that, whatever be the state of our minds, so long as our reason remains, we can build no excuse on this ground for neglecting to pray. If we have no liking to it, if we are cold and dull, wandering and worldly in our affections, just so much the more need have we to wrestle with our indifference and reluctant feelings and not allow them to drive us from God and our duty. Instead of sitting down in a contented, careless, or desponding state, our fears and anxie-

[14] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, p. 75.
[15] Watts's Guide to Prayer, pp. 55, 56.
[16] Hill's It is Well, 1828, p. 154.

ties about our safety should alarm our souls, and excite us to make every effort in our power to bring our hearts into a praying temper; for the further that these circumstances show us to be from God, so much the more earnestly ought we to exert ourselves to lessen the distance and get near to him. The farther off we are from him, the more dangerous is our situation, and the more anxious we should be to escape from it, and reach his presence, where alone we can be safe. But this can never be if we yield to every unhallowed humour and ungodly fancy which arise in our corrupt nature and tempt us to neglect prayer.

3. A third pretence for neglecting prayer is the want of abilities to perform the duty aright.

It is not an uncommon thing to hear people professing their regard for devotion, and their desire and willingness to encourage it among the members of their household, but at the same time attempting to excuse themselves from leading the way by their own example, on the alleged ground that they do not find themselves qualified for conducting divine worship in the presence of others. The language of such generally is, "I have no ability to pray in my family. I have no talents or gifts for this work, and should only expose myself. It has been remarked, 'This is almost the only case in which people are apt to have a very mean opinion of their own abilities. But this is not the language of Christian humility.' Let me reply to the objection in the words of Milner: 'It is acknowledged that many *are* unfit for such an undertaking. But we have good and sound forms of prayer, easily procured, which you may make use on these occa-

sions.'"[1] Besides, let me ask you, "Have you ever tried to pray? Have you ever asked God to enable you to pray? Many children, when a hard lesson is given them, say to their teachers, I cannot learn it. Yet, by trying and attending to the instructions they receive, the hardest lessons are mastered. So it will be with you as to prayer. Only try, remembering that God accepts the willing mind."[2] "Use the one talent, and God will increase it;[3] and helps are to be had[4] till you are better able."[5]

Cases, no doubt, do occur in which well-disposed persons, from defects in their organs of speech, and other physical infirmities, are incapable of conducting social worship so as to edify others and promote aright the ends of outward religion. But the number of such instances is small when contrasted with that of such as neglect family prayer, without having an excuse of this nature to plead, and with many helps at hand.

Admitting, however, that "though very few, comparatively speaking, have ability to adapt the matter of prayer to their peculiar circumstances in the presence and hearing of others, yet every one is sufficiently qualified to do this alone before his God, who seeth in secret; because in this case frequent hesitations are not in the least either detrimental or inconvenient, nor phrases at which men might be apt to take offence, improper, when meant well. The same God who prepares the heart to call upon him will hearken thereto. All men naturally stand upon a level with respect to the ability of praying truly, and remain alike incapable, without the grace of God, of real

---

[1] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 153.
[2] Ibid. pp. 20, 21.
[3] Matt. xxv. 27.
[4] 2 Cor. i. 11.
[5] Alleine's Alarm, p. 188.

prayer."[6] But "He who has universally made prayer a prime duty of man has qualified man for the performance of this duty,"[7] by giving him grace sufficient for it, if he will but use it; and when he *does* use it, there is no want of ability to pray.

"When the mind is truly touched by grace, it will and must pray. If the heart cannot find words to carry up its requests, it will send them forth in earnest groans. Prayer can no more be kept from ascending, than flame from the fire. The cries of a drowning man are above the formality of words, and forcibly pierce the ear for help. So the deep-felt anguish of a convinced heart is inexpressibly eager for mercy, and with moans and groans sues it out from God in right earnest."[8] "The fears, hopes, and desires of the condemned criminal inspire him with an energetic, though perhaps rude, eloquence, when allowed to supplicate the clemency of his prince; and even the little child finds apt words to ask his parent for food, and to complain of cold or pain. Why, then, cannot men find language when they would beseech the Lord to give them the blessings promised in his word? Because the state of their hearts is so contrary to those blessings that they feel no want or desire of them."[9]

In short, "prayer is neither a secret nor a science which we may learn from men; nor is it an art or a private method, upon which it is necessary to consult skilful teachers in order to be master of its rules and precepts. Is it necessary to teach a sick person to entreat

---

[6] Venn's Duty of Man, pp. 260, 264.

[7] Dwight's Theology, Serm. 144.

[8] Serle's Christian Remembrancer, p. 120.

[9] Scott's Essays, p. 382.

relief? Is a man pressed with hunger difficulted how to solicit food? Doth the urgent necessity alone not amply furnish expressions? If we felt the wants of our soul as we feel those of our body, we would soon be skilful in the divine art of prayer. We would not complain that we had nothing to say in the presence of a God of whom we have so much to ask."[10]

"Say not, then, because you cannot pray as a minister, or such a gifted man, that you will not pray at all; bring a humble and broken heart to God, and he will accept of you, though you had but two or three words or broken sentences. It is not fine words or eloquent expressions that God is delighted with. It is the sincerity of the heart. Do as you can, and God will teach you to do better. I never knew any that tried it sincerely, but God helped them."[11] He "will be with thy mouth and teach thee what to say;"[12] for "the word is very nigh unto thee,"[13] and the "commandment is not grievous."[14] "I create the fruit of the lips, saith the Lord."[15]

It is evident, then, that to allege inability, as an excuse for neglecting prayer, can never be sustained. That all are not equally endowed with those qualifications which are necessary for arranging and expressing their thoughts aright in prayer, will be readily allowed. But this inequality cannot furnish the slightest plea of exemption from the duty of prayer to any one, either as the head of a family or as a private individual, who is not labouring under some decidedly insurmountable impediment in

---

[10] Massillon's Serm., Matt. xv. 22.
[11] Willison's Sabbath, p. 138.
[12] Ex. iv. 10–12.
[13] Deut. xxx. 14.
[14] 1 John v. 3.
[15] Isaiah lvii. 19.

his judgment or bodily faculties. God has endowed all, unless where these exceptions occur, with such a measure of abilities as renders them inexcusable on this head, if they do not pray, either in society or alone. Whatever they may be, whether in high or humble station, whether learned or ignorant, rich or poor, old or young, despised or respected, they cannot be exempted from the public or private worship of Him who is the hearer of prayer and who exacts this homage from all the children of men. One law applies to all, and all must obey it, or pay its penalties; for He who enacted it, and ordained it to be universal, also ordained that all by whom it was to be kept should be endowed with power sufficient to keep it. Inability, therefore, is a mere pretence.

4. A fourth pretence for neglecting prayer is the want of time.

This is a plea which is used by all the prayerless, in all the stations and professions in life. From the most active votaries of ambition, whose minds are occupied with the cares of kingdoms, down to the most worthless idler, who only labours to get rid of the passing hours which press so heavily upon his spirit, all have at their command the short and ever ready excuse, We have no time to pray. They are all more or less like those of old who, when invited to the marriage feast, "made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise."[1] "The first said, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it, I pray thee have me excused; and another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them, I pray thee

[1] Matt. xxii. 5.

have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."[2] This is reversing our Saviour's rule, to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"[3] and leave all worldly things to follow in their proper order.

"'Tis very true that all persons have not equal leisure for this purpose. Some are much more straitened than others, and more taken up with the necessary cares of this life. But God hath put no man upon this hard necessity, that for want of time he should be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and estate, to save his soul. And yet, if any man were brought to this distress, it were well worth his while to secure his eternal salvation though it were with the neglect and loss of all other things."[4] "Persons who are in considerable offices have so many indispensable duties to fulfil, that scarcely any time remains to them for communion with God, except they strictly apply themselves to its regulation. It is necessary, then, to be firm in adopting and observing a rule."[5]

Of the practicability and advantage of acting on this principle, we have a distinguished example in the history of one of the most renowned of the kings of England. "Amidst all the pressure of public affairs, Alfred the Great continued to dedicate a third part of his time to the Author of his being. It were well if men of business, who are wont to plead the variety and urgency of their engagements as an excuse for the neglect of private,

---

[2] Luke xiv. 18–20; Mal. iii. 14.

[3] Matt. vi. 33; Mal. iii. 10–12; Ex. xxxiv. 24.

[4] Archbishop Tillotson's Serm., Matt. vi. 33.

[5] Fenelon, in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 22.

domestic, or public devotions, were to study attentively this interesting part of the character of our illustrious Alfred. They would perceive that it is possible, by a rigid economy of time and an inflexible adherence to method, to make the most distinguished attainments in literature, to prosecute works of magnitude and public utility, and even to guide the machine of government, and yet to reserve a considerable portion of every day for the duties of self-examination and devotion. Nor is it difficult thus to afford a practical illustration of the apostle's precept, 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord,' if we are solicitous, like him, to gather up the fragments of time, so that nothing be lost."[6] It is also recorded of Constantine the Great, the first of the Roman emperors who professed Christianity, that, "notwithstanding the vast cares of the empire to engage his time, he would every day, at stated hours, retire to his closet, and, on his knees, offer up his prayers to the glorious God." And, "that he might recommend this duty to the world, he caused his image on all his gold coins, and his pictures and statues, to be made in a praying posture, with his hands extended and his eyes lifted up to heaven."[7]

"Say not, 'I have no time.' Find but a heart, and I will find time. Pinch out your meals and sleep, rather than want for prayer. Say not, 'My business will not give leave.' This is the greatest business, to save thyself and the souls committed to thee. The blessings of all are to be got by prayer; and what is thy business

---

[6] Morell's History of England, vol. i. p. 62.

[7] Mather's Essays, 1825, p. 144. See Ps. cxix. 164; Dan. vi. 10.

without God's blessing?"[8] "Do we take devotion itself to be no business? What of greater moment? I cannot wait on God, because I must speak with a friend. I cannot discharge my duty to God, because a greater obligation than that doth lie upon me! Were it not strangely absurd to say this? Moreover, if we reflect what vast portions of time we squander away upon our petty matters, upon voluptuous enjoyments, upon fruitless pastimes, upon impertinent talk, how can we satisfy ourselves in not allotting competent time for God's service, our own salvation, and the future everlasting state? In truth, attending upon devotion can be no obstacle, but will be great furtherance, to all other good business. In fine, we may be sure that no time is spent even so prudently and politicly, with so great advantage and so real fruit to ourselves, as that which is employed upon devotion. In sacrificing his time, his pains, his substance, any thing he hath or can do, to God's service, no man can be a loser;" for "the wisest manager of secular affairs may find the time he has employed in imploring the favour of Heaven, sooner or later, turning to the best account."[9] "Family prayer will not hinder your business, though in the throng of harvest. What stop would it be to your work to be every morning and every evening a quarter of an hour upon your knees with your family? Nay, it would further it, and procure a blessing on the work of your hands. I have observed that in those parts of the nation where husbandmen and tradesmen take time for family worship they are in a more flourishing

[8] Alleine's Alarm, p. 188.

[9] Barrow's Sermons, 1 Thess. v. 17.

condition in worldly things than in those parts where it is neglected. Remember that all the success of your labour depends on the special blessing and providence of God, and there is no way more likely to obtain this than family prayer. If God vouchsafe not his blessing, your labour will be labour in vain."[10] [11] "How soon may God blast all the labours of prayerless persons!"[12] True devotion "is in many respects apt to promote and advance men's temporal estate, by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful endeavours, by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of truth and justice and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid reputation and good esteem among men, which is an unspeakable advantage in business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting instruments of prosperity and success."[13] "Religion is the most economical thing in the world, and sin the most expensive. How much do the drunkard, debauchee, Sabbath-breaker, and frequenter of theatres pay for their sinful gratifications? What is spent in this kingdom every year in the grosser sensual indulgences would pay the interest of the national debt. Piety would save all this to the nation. The conviction of the cognizance of God, and a suitable observation of divine providence, will tend not a little to make a man

---

[10] Dr. Fothergill's Serm., Prov. iii. 5, 6.

[11] Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2; Mal. ii. 2.

[12] Willison's Sabbath, p. 142.

[13] Archbishop Tillotson's Serm., Matt. vi. 33.

industrious; and it is 'the hand of the diligent that maketh rich.'"[14]

But, even although the case were otherwise, the advancing of the great and everlasting interests of our souls thereby ought to be sufficient to silence the objection of want of time; for it was for this very purpose that our time was given us. "Wherefore was time given you, but to entreat of God to forget your crimes, to look upon you with eyes of compassion, and to place you one day among the number of his holy? You have not time to pray? But you have not time, then, to be a Christian; for a man who prays not is a man who has no God, no worship, and no hope. Is time ever wanting to solicit the favours of the earth to bestow upon pleasures or upon idleness?" But not "a single moment for eternity!!"[15] "Is not religion and the care of our souls the work of every day, as much as eating and drinking to preserve our bodily health and strength is?"[16] Nay, it is far more; for our Saviour has said it. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."[17]

"Besides his particular calling for the support of this life, every one has a concern in a future life, which he is bound to look after. Men, therefore, cannot be excused from understanding the words and framing the

---

[14] Dun on Providence, p. 125.
[15] Massillon's Serm., Matt. xv. 22.
[16] Sherlock on Death, ed. 17th, p. 172.
[17] Matt. vi. 25, 33.

general notions relating to religion right. The one day of seven, besides other days of rest, allows, in the Christian world, time enough for this had they no other idle hours, if they would but make use of these vacancies from their daily labour, and apply themselves to an improvement of knowledge with as much diligence as they often do to a great many other things that are useless."[18] Hence it is manifest that "whatever you pretend from want of time on weekdays, to excuse yourselves from family worship" and other devotional duties, "yet there is no shadow for this objection upon the Sabbath-day, in which you have no other business but to serve and worship God."[19]

Nay, not only has every one sufficient time every day, and especially on the Lord's day, for family and private devotion, but even in the midst of business itself there are many intervals and occasions for at least mental and ejaculatory prayer. If we be but willing, "we shall not want innumerable opportunities of lifting up our souls to God, even when we cannot engage in the more lengthened exercises of devotion; for no man ever was, or ever can be, so immersed in the business of life, as not to be able to breathe a petition for a Father's blessing on every important step that he is about to take."[20] "Even in the midst of your employments and recreations, sentiments of praise, of thanksgiving, of contrition, of supplication, may be ascending to the mercy-seat;[21] for a Christian will find his parenthesis for prayer, even

---

18 Locke on the Understanding, sec. 8.

19 Willison's Sabbath, p. 143.

20 Gordon's Serm., Dan. ix. 20, 23.

21 Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 6.

through his busiest hours."[22] "A thousand occurrences which happen when we are engaged in the affairs of the world, and a thousand objects which present themselves to our view, in the earth and the heavens, when we are solitary and alone, may suggest matter of devout ejaculation towards God. And either from the crowded city or the solitary field we can send up to heaven that homage of the heart which is no less acceptable to the Almighty than if it arose in vocal form in the midst of the temple."[23] In short, "we may pray in bed, on horseback,[24] everywhere, and at all times, and in all circumstances; and it is well if we do so; for every pious prayer and well-employed opportunity is a degree of return to hope and pardon."[25]

It remains, then, as a fact which cannot be controverted, that, however busy we may be, we can lose nothing, but must gain much, by devoting portions of our time every day to prayer, in our families and alone. The haymaker loses nothing in the time he spends in sharpening his scythe, or the labourer in that which he takes up in eating his frugal meal, but the reverse, both operations helping on the work in hand.

Much time is wasted every day, and especially every Lord's day, that might be easily saved and given to God. Were we to deduct all that is spent in unnecessary sleep, idleness, useless studies, vain conversations, and sinful pursuits of one kind or other, we would find that we devote very little time to the really necessary business

---

[22] Cecil's Remains, ed. 8th, p. 390.

[23] Blair's Serm., Ps. lxv. 2.

[24] 1 Tim. ii. 8.

[25] Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying, ed. 1827, p. 198.

and duties of the world, which we pretend interfere so much with our duties of a religious nature. With such a vast majority of the hours of our time thus absolutely thrown away, and yielding nothing but evil, while so very small a portion of them is used for any justifiable purpose whatever, it is a most amazing degree of presumption, or stupidity, in any prayerless person, to say that he has no leisure to attend to the duties of devotion. The only truly and lastingly profitable business, therefore, and the supreme business for which life was given to man and is continued with him, and without attending to which time is thrown away and is useless, is to be continually endeavouring to keep a sense of God in the heart, by the diligent use of devotional means, and thereby grow in his favour, and receive his blessings, "which maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."[26]

5. A fifth pretence for neglecting prayer is grounded on a false view of the characters of those who pray, and those who pray not. Thus, it is alleged that many persons of sound judgment, extensive acquirements, and good moral character neglect and despise prayer, and consider it only fit for the sick, the aged, the weak, and those who have some worldly end to serve by it; while those who make the greatest professions of religion are often persons of small attainments, inferior judgment, inconsistent conduct, and doubtful sincerity, and many of them even notorious knaves; and from this contrast the conclusion is drawn, in violation of all sound reasoning, that persons of spirit, integrity, and talent ought not to pray. The writings of Hume, and men of similar

---

[26] Prov. x. 22.

sentiments, "certainly have produced, among numbers eager to be esteemed superior to the prejudices of their fellow-creatures, a state of mind most unfavourable to religion, leading them to regard whatever is connected with it as unworthy of serious discussion, as what, although it be adapted to amuse or to restrain the great mass of mankind, should not occupy the time or employ the talents of those enlightened by philosophy."[1]

"Your men of wit look upon themselves as discharged from the duties of religion, and confine the doctrines of the gospel to people of meaner understandings, and look on that man to be a narrow genius who studies to be good."[2] These are the words of the Duke of Buckingham, and they refer to the intellectual view of the objection. The Earl of Rochester referred to the moral view, and its effects, when he "urged in defence of his irregularities the misconduct of Christians themselves, which, he said, had given him, and many others, great encouragement to continue in iniquities."[3] To this it was well replied by Bishop Burnet that, "at all events, it was unreasonable to make the faults of others a plea or vindication for himself;"[4] and to the allegation of superior talent among the prayerless, it might also be replied that it is a mere assumption of infidelity and self-conceit; and though it were true, it could not bear the conclusion which they lay upon it.

But we can prove this in another way. We can bring

---

[1] Dr. Cook's View of Christianity, vol. i. p. 209.

[2] The Duke of Buckingham's Letter to Dr. Barlow, in Br. Test. p. 74.

[3] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 61.

[4] Ibid. p. 62.

it to the test of facts, and, even upon the very ground on which the prayerless profess to stand secure, show the falsehood of their position. They have, for example, but little cause to assume a superiority over the godly on the score of morality. It will be readily admitted that there are many great *professors* of godliness who lead very inconsistent and wicked lives. But these are "not Christians. Christianity does not acknowledge them, and has not got any hold of them, and is not responsible for them. They are mere pretenders. They are infidels in disguise. This hypocrisy has no more alliance with true religion than counterfeit money has with the genuine coin."[5] "The church will never be without some hypocrites and scandal, nor the best without some faults and passions, nor the holiest action without some mixture of frailty and infirmity, nor will the very goodness and holiness of the action be free from plausible calumnies and scorns, while the wit and the venom of the serpent are in the heads and hearts of wicked men. How easy is it to put a name of ignominy upon every person and every duty."[6] But to make use of such means as an excuse for neglecting a positive duty, the obligation of which rests entirely on other grounds, is absurd. "To say that religion is not a restraining motive, because it does not always restrain, is equally absurd as to say that civil laws are not a restraining motive,"[7] because multitudes break them. After making these allowances, however, or, in other words, "upon an impartial observation of mankind, it will be found that those men who are most con-

[5] Thomson's Sermon on Infidelity, p. 81.

[6] Baxter's Now or Never, ed. 1827, p. 59.

[7] Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws, ed. 10th, b. xxiv. c. 2.

scientious in the public and private exercises of divine worship will be most diligent in performing the duties they owe to their neighbour and in observing the rules of morality."[8] Of this we had abundant evidence under other heads,[9] and therefore we need not here enlarge upon it. We may ask, however, "how it is that, in countries where Christianity has made progress, men have almost universally agreed in reckoning a true Christian, and an amiable, open, modest, chaste, conscientious, and benevolent character, as the same thing,"[10] or terms of the same import? An enemy to prayer will have some difficulty in answering this question as he would like to do it. Hence we see the silliness and gratuitous malignity of such sneers as the following, when applied, as they often are, to the faults of professing believers: "I am sure, if such as I go to hell, we shall have store of company." To this it has been very properly answered, "And will that be any ease or comfort to you? Or do you think you may not have company enough in heaven? Will you be undone for company? Or will you not believe that God will execute his threatenings, because there are so many that are guilty? All these are altogether unreasonable conceits."[11] "The dead fish swim with the stream, but the living against it. When religion is in fashion, every one will be in it;"[12] but "if men are so wicked with religion, what would they be without it?"[13]

---

[8] Logan's Serm., Rom. xii. 11.

[9] Chap. 2, sec. 3, 2, sec. 4, 2.

[10] Fuller's Gospel its Own Witness, p. 64.

[11] Baxter's Call, p. 155.

[12] Alleine's Alarm, p. 191.

[13] Franklin's Correspondence, 1, 279, Br. Test. p. 85.

Judging from the lives of those who profess to have no religion, the answer to this question would be dreadful. There are, no doubt, many prayerless men who support a decent outward appearance in society, and are useful, and even respected, in their stations. But much more is made of such cases than the discoveries of a close examination would warrant; and who knows but even the little good which is thus exaggerated may have been owing to early impressions of piety, or its restraining but insensible influence working around them? What Franklin said to Paine is not improbably equally applicable to them: "Perhaps you are indebted to her originally [that is, to your religious education] for the habits of virtue upon which you now so justly value yourself."[14]

But such virtue is found to be indeed very frail, as may easily be seen in daily life. "Thus you may frequently observe a profane man, who prides himself in his moral worth and pours contempt upon devotional duties, miserably chagrined by every trifling disappointment, or for the least fancied provocation breathing revenge. You may frequently observe a contemner of prayer, who is much caressed and self-applauded for good nature and humanity, studiously injuring virgin innocence for the gratification of corrupt animal appetites."[15] George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, when labouring under the miseries of an awakened conscience, said, "To purchase a smile from a blockhead whom I despised, I have frequently treated the virtuous with disrespect, and

---

[14] Franklin's Correspondence, 1, 279, Br. Test. p. 85.

[15] Venn's Duty of Man, p. 267.

sported with the holy name of Heaven to claim a laugh from a parcel of fools who were entitled to nothing but my contempt." "He is represented as having been destitute of every principle of friendship, virtue, or religion."[16] Count Struensee confessed that "profligacy and ambition were the rocks on which he split. His moral principles were corrupt, and he indulged, without consideration or remorse, in every species of voluptuousness."[17]

"Will you dare to assert," says Linguet, a French writer, in an address to Voltaire, "that it is in philosophic families we are to look for models of filial respect, conjugal love, sincerity in friendship, or fidelity among domestics? Were you disposed to do so, would not your own conscience, your own experience, suppress the falsehood even before your lips could utter it?"[18] Linguet might well rest his appeal to this champion of infidelity on the ground of his experience, which was certainly bad enough. "The hands which raised the veil and laid open the most intimate secrets of Voltaire's philosophic retirement, in the country-seat of Madame Du Châtelet, not merely displayed a connection offensive to severer moralists, whose condemnation Voltaire himself would have treated with indifference; they have lowered him in the estimation of less scrupulous persons, by the display of so many miserable acts of domestic baseness and tyranny. Nothing can soften or excuse this total want of dignity of character, this inveterate selfishness, this condescension to the basest means of gratifying his spleen or feed-

[16] Duke of Buckingham's Letter to Dr. Barlow, Br. Test. p. 74.

[17] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 95.

[18] Linguet, in Fuller's Gospel its Own Witness, 1830, p. 67.

ing his insatiate vanity."[19] "Such is the detestable meanness, as well as wickedness, of infidelity, that, during his efforts to destroy Christianity, he was accustomed to receive the sacrament, and to attend to some other outward acts of religion, that he might be able to deny his infidelity if accused of it." J. J. Rousseau "lived in guilty connections with different women, and sent the children he had by one unhappy woman to the foundling-hospital."[20] Paine "was an avowed infidel in principle, and an open profligate and drunkard in practice."[21] Hume, whose morality has been so much eulogized, maintained "that adultery must be practised if men would obtain all the advantages of life, and that self-murder is but the turning of a few ounces of blood from its natural channel."[22] Of most of these and various other kindred spirits Dr. Dwight has given the following account, in his discourses on the nature and danger of infidel philosophy:

"The morals of Rochester and Wharton need no comment. Woolston was a gross blasphemer. Blount solicited his sister-in-law to marry him, and, being refused, shot himself. Tindal was originally a Protestant, then turned Papist, then Protestant again, merely to suit the times, and was at the same time infamous for vice in general, and the total want of principle. He is said to have died with this prayer in his mouth: 'If there be a God, I desire that he may have mercy on me.' Hobbes wrote his Leviathan to serve the cause of Charles I.; but, finding him fail of success, he turned it to the defence of Cromwell, and made a merit of this fact to the

[19] Quarterly Review, July, 1832, p. 302.
[20] Pike's True Happiness, pp. 201, 206.
[21] Ibid. p. 207.
[22] Ibid. p. 196.

usurper, as Hobbes himself unblushingly declared to Lord Clarendon. Morgan had no regard for truth, as is evident from his numerous falsifications of Scripture, as well as from the vile hypocricy of professing himself a Christion in those very writings in which he labours to destroy Christianity. Voltaire, in a letter now remaining, requested his friend D'Alembert to tell for him a direct and palpable lie, by denying that he was the author of the Philosophical Dictionary. D'Alembert, in his answer, informed him that he had told the lie. Hume[23] died as a fool dieth. The day before, he spent in a pitiful and affected unconcern about this tremendous subject, playing at whist, reading Lucian's Dialogues, and making silly attempts at wit concerning his interview with Charon, the heathen ferryman of Hades. Collins, though he had no belief in Christianity, yet qualified himself for civil office by partaking of the Lord's Supper. Shaftesbury did the same; and the same has been also done by hundreds of other infidels. Yet these are the men who are continually declaiming against the hypocrisy of priests. 'I have been a rogue,' said J. J. Rousseau, 'and am so still, sometimes for trifles, which I had rather take than ask for.' So much for the morality of infidels."[24] The picture is drawn from the past, but equally represents the morals of infidels of the present day; for infidelity is the same at all times. It always destroys religion; and to do so "is to let loose the wretched and desperate, a

---

[23] Dr. Smith's Letter to Mr. Strachan, in Preface to Hume's History of England.

[24] Dwight, quoted in Buck's Anecdotes, vol. ii. pp. 37, 38, and in Fuller's Gospel, p. 71.

formidable body, upon the easy, affluent, and happy,"[25] to do all the evil they can.

So far as the objection has a reference, then, to the moral character and conduct of the praying and the prayerless, its falsehood is abundantly evident; and it can only be maintained by those who are ignorant of the state of the question or have some bad end to serve. The same remark applies to what has been so often and so confidently said about the intellectual superiority of the prayerless over those that pray, as the following remarks will show.

That there are many irreligious persons of very great abilities, and who have distinguished themselves in many departments of intellectual labour, while multitudes of very pious members of society have always been known to have been of slender capacity and little activity, are truths which none can dispute. But this can never be taken as conclusive reasoning; for the reverse of the proposition is equally true.

It is clear, however, that there must be something very far wrong in the judgment of every man who does not keep up an intercourse with the Father of his spirit and the Giver of all his blessings, and whose morality is so bad as that which we have just now been considering. "No man that is in his right mind will desert true religion to fall into error and impiety."[26] "To renounce all good, when it is attainable by any means, however difficult, is the conduct of a fool. To renounce it when the means are the easiest possible, is the conduct of a mad-

---

[25] Seed's Sermons, Rom. xii. 12.

[26] Justin Martyr, in Cave's Lives of the Fathers, p. 151.

man. Such a fool, such a madman, is he who neglects prayer. To pray, costs neither money, pains, nor time."[27] "I am sure it can be no good reason which is against the God of truth and reason; it cannot be light that is contrary to the sun. There is no knowledge in any creature but what it has from God; and therefore none can be wiser than God. It was damnable presumption in the highest angel to compare with his Creator. What is it, then, for a lump of earth, an ignorant sot, that knoweth not himself nor his own soul, that knoweth but little of the things which he seeth, yea, that is more ignorant than many of his neighbours, to set himself against the wisdom of the Lord?"[28] And yet this is the light in which we must view every prayerless person, whether professing to be a Christian or not.

The mass of deluded beings which this view takes in is incalculably great. "How many who profess to be Christ's disciples despise this high privilege, and live altogether without prayer, or use it carelessly, and pray without meaning, or act in direct opposition to their supplications, and refuse to seek the very blessings for which they profess to pray!"[29] A pitiable specimen, surely, of intellectual greatness! "How painful it is to reflect that there should be in this kingdom," which boasts so much of its superior intelligence and high character over other nations, "many domestic societies among whom the worship of the Deity is not known, in whose houses no grateful accents are ever heard, no exultation

---

[27] Dwight's Theology, 1 Thess. v. 7.
[28] Baxter's Call, pp. 149, 150.
[29] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. vi. 7–12.

of heart for the divine goodness. There are, indeed, accents of exultation and mirth, and the harp and the viol and the tabret and the pipe are in their feasts; but there is no remembrance of God. They regard not the operation of his hands. These men pass through life in silence, insensible to the mercies, or judgments, or power, or providence, of the unseen God."[30] And can such ungrateful and undiscerning stupidity be termed an evidence of greatness of mind? None but fools can think so. There was a time when piety was not thus neglected in our land; for Kirkton testifies, in his History of the Church of Scotland, that about the middle of the seventeenth century "you would not, for a great part of the country, have lodged in a family where the Lord was not worshipped, by reading, singing, and prayer."[31] "We have heard of men who affected to hold fast by the tenets of natural religion while they repudiated those of divine revelation; but we have never been so fortunate as to see and converse with one of them who could restrain his sneer at piety the most untinctured with enthusiasm, or who worshipped the God in whose existence and attributes he acknowledged his belief;"[32] and surely such weakness, malignity, and inconsistency show little superiority over the steady and fearless believer.

"We reckon among those who oppose a contemptuous smile to religious opinions, a multitude of young people, often incapable of supporting the most trivial arguments, and who perhaps could not connect two or three abstract propositions. These pretended philosophers, artfully,

[30] Dr. Buchanan, in Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 15, 2.

[31] Kirkton's History of the Church of Scotland, p. 84.

[32] Dr. Andrew Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 15.

and almost perfidiously, take advantage of the first flight of self-love to persuade beginners that they are able to judge at a glance of the serious questions which have eluded the penetration of the most exercised thinkers."[33] "But you should by no means seem to approve, encourage, or applaud these libertine notions, which strike at religion equally, and which are the poor thread-bare topics of half-wits and minute philosophers. Even those who are silly enough to laugh at their jokes are still wise enough to distrust and detest their character."[34]

But, whether among young or old, and "in whatever form skepticism appears, or from whatever cause it springs, it may be confidently pronounced hostile to true philosophy; for its obvious tendency is to invalidate every principle of human knowledge, to destroy every criterion of truth, and to undermine the foundation of all science, human and divine;"[35] and a prayerless spirit is nothing else than one modification of a skeptical spirit, to which all this applies, as illustrative of its real meanness.

Of this way of thinking, a very competent judge has said, "It destroys man's nobility and magnanimity, and the raising of human nature;"[36] and it has been maintained by another authority that "even the affectation of religion is, independently of its foolish impiety, always the mark of a bad taste."[37] Therefore, however "much stress has been laid upon the infidelity of men of" even "acknowledged talent," still, "with those who

---

[33] Necker's Opinions, 392, in Br Test. 17.

[34] Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son, vol. ii. p. 228.

[35] Brucker's History of Philosophy, by Enfield, 2, 480, Br. Test. 9.

[36] Lord Bacon's Essays, p. 50, Br. Test. 3.

[37] Prince Eugene's Memoirs, p. 36, Br. Test. p. 23.

know what faith is," this "will have no weight."[38] The judgment being unenlightened and the will perverted, and also the heart disaffected to religion, all their talents and acquirements are insufficient to qualify them for being authorities and guides in a matter involving the very vitals of godliness. This every properly educated and experienced believer soon perceives whenever he examines their writings, or enters into conversation with them on religious subjects, or has an opportunity of witnessing their daily manner of life. In fact, all the gradations of impiety, from the delusions of the atheist to those of the mere nominal professor of Christianity, are nothing else than so many obliquities and aberrations of mind.

But, even though less of this charge were attachable to the godless than really belongs to them, it would still fail to support the objection to prayer which is built upon it; for, by this test, we have a vast preponderance of talent on the other side to destroy the objection. This might very naturally be supposed to be the case from the kind of intellectual exercise which is constantly going on in the truly godly. "The same seriousness of thought, the same abstraction from secular cares and fixedness of attention to an invisible object, which acts of devotion require, must be proportionably serviceable in the contemplation of abstract truths and the acquisition of mental accomplishments. And as the regular exertion of such acts must naturally tend to render those qualifications habitual, may it not be supposed to have a like tendency (besides procuring the assistance we implore) to qualify us for investigating the more abstruse points of science?"[39]

[38] Dr. Suttleworth's Sermons, John vii. 17.

[39] Dr. Fothergill's Sermons, Prov. iii. 5, 6.

"Reasoning and reflection are indeed necessary to raise the mind to worthy conceptions of the divine attributes, and to cure it of those prejudices which arise from limited and erroneous views of nature;" and "our conceptions of these attributes always rise in proportion as our faculties are cultivated."[40] "To discern and to worship a superintending power is an evidence of the enlargement and maturity of the human understanding;"[41] and "they who have made the highest advances in true science will be the first to bend in humble adoration before a wisdom which it cannot fathom and a power which it cannot comprehend."[42]

Besides, the question might be disposed of at once, on the ground that God would not require this if it were not consistent with his infinite wisdom, and, consequently, agreeable to the most enlightened reason;[43] for "he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?"[44] "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[45]

But, to come closer to the kind of evidence here required, even among men, the greatest masters of reason have practised and held the duties of devotion to be conformable to the soundest reason, and, under this impression, have exerted themselves to promote a spirit of piety in others.[46] However much "the vain-glorious skeptic, the half-witted infidel, may affect to ridicule religion, as a mental infirmity or an evidence of a weak and imbecile mind, the history of all ages proves that philosophy and

---

[40] Stuart's Outlines of Moral Philosophy, pp. 198, 203, 204.
[41] Robertson's History of America, vol. i. p. 366.
[42] Abercrombie on the Intellectual Powers, p. 22.
[43] Ps. c. 3, &c.
[44] Ps. xciv. 10.
[45] Col. ii. 3.
[46] Ps. ii. 10, 11, &c.

religion are lovely plants, frequently nurtured in the same soil, and flourishing or decaying together."[47] "Learning and philosophy never shone more brightly than when they met with faith and religion in the mind of the excellent Lord Bacon."[48]

"They are only pretenders to learning and knowledge who are patrons of infidelity. The testimony of two such men as Lord Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton (the two greatest men whom this country, or perhaps the whole world, hath produced) is enough to weigh down the authority of all the infidels who ever lived."[49] "In solid and masculine sense, and in erudition, classical and philosophical, who are the champions of infidelity that deserve to be compared with Taylor, Wilkins, Cudworth, Barrow, Clarke, Boyle, and Newton?"[50] "Religion is no enemy to sound philosophy, and sound philosophy is no enemy to religion. It is pleasant when we see them both go on hand in hand together; and that they can do so, we need only bring to our remembrance such distinguished characters as Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Selden, Grotius, Addison, Boerhaave, Euler," &c.[51] Therefore, "if ever you are taunted with the weakness of preferring the gospel to philosophy, remember, for your comfort and encouragement, that the gospel has found some of its ablest advocates in the most enlightened of philosophers, and that it can never be an imputation on your understanding to believe in that which engaged the patient inquiry and

---

[47] Morell's History of England, vol. i. p. 269.

[48] Adams's Lectures on Natural Philosophy, i. 24, in Br. Test. p. 39.

[49] Bishop Newton on Prophecy, ed. 1826, p. 722.

[50] White's Bampton Lectures, Matt. xi. 19.

[51] Buck's Anecdotes, vol. ii. p. 200.

commanded the steady belief of a Locke, a Newton, and a Boyle,"[52] and many others, whose names have long adorned the brightest pages in the annals of literature and science.

Those, in short, who have been enabled to ascend to the highest and purest regions of human research, and have shone forth as the most brilliant and steadfast lights of philosophy and learning, have all been deeply impressed with a conviction of the obligation and wisdom of prayer, and all have made it an object of peculiar attention, even in the midst of their severest investigations. It is evident, indeed, from the examples of such persons, as well as from the nature of prayer, and the command of God regarding it, that it is a duty which is identified with the very highest acts of reason or human intellect in this life, and, consequently, that the most devotional are the most rational part of mankind. "Religion is exalted reason, refined and sifted from the grosser parts of it. It dwelleth in the upper region of the mind, where there are fewer clouds or mists to darken or offend it. It is both the foundation and the crown of all virtue. It is morality improved and raised to its height, by being carried nearer heaven, the only place where perfection resideth. It cleareth the understanding, and brusheth off the earth that hangeth about our souls."[53]

With so many illustrious names on the side of prayer, then, and with none against that can bear to be compared with them, the prayerless can derive no benefit from this

---

[52] Thomson's Sermons on Infidelity, p. 249.

[53] Savile Marquis of Halifax's Advice to his Daughter, in Br. Test. pp. 68, 69.

kind of argument,—from reasoning by contrast. Nay, were the talents, morality, and respectability of the despisers of prayer even a thousand times greater than they actually are, and those of the true worshippers of God just as many times less than they really are, still it would be contrary to all sound reasoning to infer from this that the duty of prayer, the obligation of which depends on no man's intellectual or moral powers, but on Heaven's wisdom and authority, should be neglected or despised as unworthy of superior minds. But the reasoning becomes more worthless still when it professes to rest its conclusions on a superiority of qualities in the godless, which, when properly examined, is found to have no existence. No case being made out, therefore, against prayer, but all circumstances, the more they are investigated, turning out in favour of prayer, the conclusion is manifest and incontrovertible, that we should not allow ourselves to be blinded with the delusions of an unthinking world on this subject, but steadily adhere to the faithful practice of this duty.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT ARE THE REAL CAUSES WHICH MOST FREQUENTLY OCCASION NEGLECT OF PRAYER?

THE great leading cause from which all other causes derive their force is the native depravity of the human heart, which is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,"[1] and which, while in a carnal or unrenewed state, is "enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."[2] "Men are born sinners, and their nature hath an enmity to God and goodness, as the nature of a serpent hath to a man."[3] "The deep corruption of man's nature, and his utter alienation from the life of God, the necessity of his heart being renewed unto holiness, and the spiritual nature of those sacrifices and services which God requires of him, are doctrines of the truth of which he has no corresponding experience within."[4] And therefore he has no inclination to apply to God in prayer for what he does not feel that he wants. But it is not with this radical cause that we are at present to deal. They are only some of its offspring, or secondary causes, that we here mean to examine.

1. The first of these which we may here consider is

---

[1] Jer. xvii. 9. [2] Rom. viii. 7.

[3] Baxter's Call, p. 166.

[4] Cooper's Letters to a Serious Inquirer, Letter II. p. 26.

ungodly education, or negligence and impiety in parents and guardians when the minds of those under their charge are most susceptible of religious impressions.

Even when those whom God has set over us are most watchful and conscientious in their trust, the general prevalence of unhallowed opinions and practices around us renders it extremely difficult for them to instil proper sentiments into our minds. "From our earliest childhood we are bred up in admiration of the external show of life. We are accustomed, as soon as we can understand any thing, to hear riches and honours spoken of as the chief goods of men, and proposed to us as the objects to which our future pursuits are to be directed. We see the measures of outward respect and deference taken from these alone."[5]

Such a practice as this, and many others of an irreligious nature which might be mentioned, more or less taint and turn away the thoughts from God to earthly things, even in spite of the exertions of the most faithful superintendents of the education of the young. How much more vitiated, then, must the tender mind gradually become, when not only no attempts are made to stir up counteracting principles in it, but when every thing in the life and conversation of those who are intrusted with the training of it tends to lead it further into error and make it more and more ungodly! Any slight strugglings excited by accidental circumstances, in such cases, soon die away. "The feelings are always getting more faintly and feebly impressed by every repetition of the cause which excited them, and the mind is always getting

[5] Blair's Sermons, Ex. xxiii. 2.

stronger in its active resistance to the impulse of these feelings, by every new deed of resistance which it performs."[6] "Many men, too, embrace falsehood for truth, not only because they never thought otherwise, but also because, thus blinded as they have been from the beginning, they never could think otherwise,—at least, without a vigour of mind able to contest the empire of habit and look into its own principles,—a freedom which few men have the notion of in themselves."[7] "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil."[8]

"Prejudices derived from early education and confirmed habit become as it were interwoven with the very constitution;"[9] for, as the poet says,

> "'Tis education forms the common mind;
> Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."[10]

"Folly, idleness, prodigality, intemperance, falsehood, dishonesty, ignorance, profaneness, and every vice of the reprobate man or woman, may often be plainly traced to the conversation heard and the lessons received and the examples seen, in their early days, in the houses of their irreligious fathers. The children of the religious man, on the contrary, are long such strangers to these vices that they know them not even by name. Strange as it may appear to some, yet it is an incontrovertible fact that children, from mere mechanical effect, receive impressions of religion, and imbibe sentiments of virtue,

---

[6] Dr. Chalmers's Introduction to Baxter's Call, p. 34.

[7] Locke on the Understanding, sec. 41.

[8] Jer. xiii. 23.

[9] White's Bampton Lectures, Acts v. 38, 39.

[10] Pope's Essay on Man.

long before they can comprehend the excellence of the one or define the beauty of the other. In them is fulfilled that saying of the gospel, 'So is the kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how.'"[11] With the conviction of these truths fixed in our minds, "we cannot wonder that of the many who profess the Christian religion there are so few that live up to it, when we consider how few are duly instructed in the first principles of it. They are noway edified by what they hear, in that the foundation is not first laid upon which they should build up themselves in that most holy faith which is preached to them, their hearts not being prepared beforehand, and rightly disposed, by having the principles of the doctrines of Christ first infused into them."[12] "The human mind, formed to religion, soon opens to the reception of ideas"[13] of a devotional character, when ordinary attention is paid to it, and when once the proper impressions are fixed in it they become lasting.

On this principle, "we may often turn with hope to the very young, to the little ones of the flock, and endeavour to teach them to sing hosannahs to the Son of David, before their minds are wholly absorbed in the world and its allurements. We may trust that a blessing shall attend our labours, if undertaken in faith and simplicity, and that some at least of our youthful disciples, like Josiah, while they are yet young may begin

---

[11] Dr. Jones's Sermons, 2 Sam. vi. 17–20.

[12] Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts, pp. 173, 174.

[13] Robertson's America, vol. i. p. 357.

to seek after the God of their fathers;"[14] for we are told, by one that cannot lie, that if we "train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it,"[15] but "go on from strength to strength."[16]

It is, therefore, "of the last importance to season the passions of a child with devotion, which seldom dies in a mind that has received an early tincture of it. Though it may seem extinguished for a while by the cares of the world, the heats of youth, or the allurements of vice, it generally breaks out, and discovers itself again, as soon as discretion, consideration, age, or misfortune have brought the man to himself. The fire may be covered and overlaid, but cannot be entirely quenched and smothered."[17]

"The stern lessons of morality, and even the sublime truths of religion, may be rigidly impressed upon the minds of the young, and may in after-life recur, from time to time, as a mere matter of remembrance; but many must have experienced how different is the impression when they recur in close association with a father's affection and a mother's tenderness,—with the lively recollection of a home, where the kindest sympathies of the human heart shed around the domestic circle all that is lovely in life, while a mild and consistent piety habitually pointed the way to a life which is to come."[18]

"We ought," therefore, "to impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind; they cannot

---

[14] Legh Richmond's Annals of the Poor, ed. 5th, pp. 3, 4.

[15] Prov. xxii. 6. [16] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

[17] Addison, Spectator, No. 201.

[18] Abercrombie's Intellectual Powers, p. 137.

be impressed too soon. A child, to feel the full force of the idea of God, ought never to remember the time when he had no such idea. We should impress him by connecting religion with a variety of sensible objects,—with all that he sees, all that he hears, all that affects his young mind with wonder and delight."[19] On this principle, let us "encourage children to thank Heaven for blessings which they have themselves experienced, and which they know how to value,—for the food they eat, for the raiment they wear, for the protection of their parents and the counsel of their teachers. To the goodness of God let them be encouraged to look up for every advantage they now enjoy, and upon his providence let them be accustomed to depend for every comfort which they hereafter expect."[20]

"Young people cannot know their duty except they are taught; and to teach them effectually you must begin early." But "teachers can do little to open and inform the minds of the young if parents will not second their endeavours."[21] Nay, "it may be said, without exaggeration, that upon you" who are parents "every thing depends; for it rests with you to determine what the coming generation shall be in their regards to Christianity. If in training your children you have neglected religion, if you have not made it a regular and essential part of the system of instruction to which you have subjected them, what can the issue of all this be but unqualified infidelity? But the case is still worse when they hear you speaking lightly of religion or see you

---

[19] Mrs. Barbauld's Hymns, Preface.
[20] Dr. Parr. [21] Thornton's Advice, pp. 53, 54.

treating it with contempt; when they observe you neglecting its ordinances and violating its precepts as if in neither department it had any authority."[22] "If you never pray with your children alone, nor in your families, or only in a cold, formal, lifeless manner, how is it likely that God should hear your prayers or your children be the better for them?"[23] By neglecting this and its kindred duties, "it comes to pass that our youth, as soon as they launch out into the world, fall an easy defenceless prey to those professors of iniquity who go about seeking whom they may devour; that they become proselytes from the best religion the world has ever blest them with, to no religion at all; and that those who should be the flower of the nation are too often the very dregs of it."[24]

Surely, then, "all those who have young people under their care are concerned to give them the best assistance they can; and it must be either an insincere pretence, or the effect of a very wild enthusiasm, for any to seem desirous of the salvation of their children, or to pray to God for it, while they are negligent in their own endeavours to furnish their minds with useful instruction"[25] and to lead them in the way of life. Oh, be persuaded, then, "for your children's sake, to pray to God that he would enable you to save them from worse than the cold and the famine and the disease with which it is anguish for you to see their little frames conflicting, and that he would enable you to guide them to the

[22] Dr. Thomson on Infidelity, pp. 218, 226, 229.

[23] Orton on Eternity, p. 36.

[24] Seed's Sermons, Rom. xii. 12.

[25] Evans's Sermons, 1825, p. 190.

knowledge of the truth; that he would preserve you from the guilt and horror of ruining by your example the mind and the soul of your children."[26] "When thou comest unto the throne of grace, bring these thy dear pledges upon thy heart with thee. Earnestly implore of God that he would own them and provide for them as his own children. Abraham asked, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!' Jacob prayed for and blessed his children and grandchildren. Job remembered his children, and offered burnt-offerings for them. Bring them also up in the practice of prayer. They cannot too early begin to seek their Saviour and to lisp his name."[27] Nay, more: "Put every one in your families upon private prayer. Get them the help of a form, if they need it, till they are able to go without it. Direct them how to pray, by reminding them of their sins, wants, and mercies,—the materials of prayer."[28] "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."[29] "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Christ;"[30] but do every thing in your power, and in humble dependence on the divine blessing, to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"[31] that he may have "a seed to serve him forever."[32]

---

[26] Dr. Brunton's Sermons, Ps. lxxii. 4.
[27] Bishop Hopkins, in Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 238.
[28] Alleine's Alarm, p. 188.
[29] Deut. vi. 6, 7.
[30] Matt. xix. 14.
[31] Eph. vi. 4.
[32] Ps. xxii.

To educate children in prayerless habits is to break a parent's vows, and be guilty of a sin which is virtually equal to perjury. It is, also, to accustom them to break a divine command, to live under no restraint arising from a sense of God's presence, to disregard all the sacredness of personal piety, and to walk in those paths in which they are exposed to every kind of danger. It is, likewise, to extend the sphere and influence of impiety, with all its evils, among men on earth, and thereby multiply the victims of sin and Satan, and add to the number of the miserable throughout eternity, to an amount that none but God's infinite knowledge can ever comprehend. If it were possible to draw aside the veil that covers the long train of events which have arisen out of a godless education, a thousandth part of the scenes of guilt and misery that would burst on the view of faithless parents and guardians of the young would be absolutely overwhelming, and so full of horror that none could behold it without distraction.

But the reverse of all this may be reasonably expected from early and continued religious instruction; and, therefore, every one who is intrusted with the charge of the young ought, for his own sake, for their sake, for the sake of society, to do every thing in his power, by authority, advice, and example, to train them up in habits of prayer and practical godliness.

2. Another cause of the neglect of prayer, with many, is timidity, or such a want of courage and decision of mind as makes them afraid or ashamed of appearing religious before others.

There "is reason to believe," said one well qualified to speak on this subject, "that, merely from timidity

of temper, many whose principles are on the side of religion and virtue are, nevertheless, found walking in the ways of sinners, and sitting in the chair of the scornful,"[1] thinking that thereby they escape from the ridicule and evil offices of their profligate acquaintances.

Many a youth, "when he must bid adieu to his native home, with all the peace and all the simplicity which abound in it," resolves not "to forget the lessons of a father's vigilance and the tenderness of a mother's prayers."[2] "But, alas! the entanglements of companionship get hold of him, and the inveteracy of habit tyrannizes over all his purposes. The infatuation gathers upon him every month, and a hardening process goes on within his heart, and the deceitfulness of sin grows apace, and he in his turn strengthens the conspiracy that is formed against the morals of a new generation."[3]

Multitudes, who have thus been seduced from the right path, often advance so far, and become so completely actuated by evil, that there is hardly any thing which they would not do to discourage piety and make others as bad as themselves. Of this Lord Rochester was a remarkable example. "He laboured most industriously to instil the moral poison into the minds of others, to undo their virtues and strengthen their evil principles,—as if he wished to root out from the nature of man every resemblance to his Maker. He took as much pains to draw others in and pervert the right ways of virtue, as the apostles and primitive saints did to save their own souls and them that heard them."[4]

---

[1] Dr. Blair's Serm., Ex. xxiii. 2.

[2] Dr. Chalmers's Commercial Serm., p. 194.

[3] Ibid. pp. 197, 198.

[4] Converts, vol. i. pp. 17, 18.

By the activity and artifices of such enemies to the truth, many weak and ill-instructed persons are so unfavourably influenced as to lose all moral fortitude, and become "ashamed of prayer. They think that it is a mark of a weak or superstitious mind. They are afraid of being laughed at and ridiculed by their ungodly companions."[5] "Ridicule has always been a formidable weapon in this warfare; and if sophistry has slain its thousands, ridicule has slain its ten thousands."[6] Yet "if those who scoff at religion substitute raillery for reason, and think to mar religion with their mockery, to all others they stand convicted the living witnesses of the truth;"[7] for of such it was said long ago, "there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts."[8] "But is it not the grossest ignorance, weakness, and delusion to be afraid of the ridicule of a perishing guilty man, and regardless of the displeasure of the everlasting and ever-blessed God? Only be firm and consistent in your devotions, and you will soon put to shame the ridicule of your companions, or God will manifestly appear on your side. Imitate Daniel's noble openness and frankness, his firm decision and integrity of devotion, and you may expect to be carried through every difficulty. The true weakness, the real littleness, is to be afraid of a worm, a creature of a day, mere dust and ashes."[9] "If I pray, I shall be excused, might Daniel think; but yet pray I must, come what will.

---

[5] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 234.

[6] Thomson on Infidelity, p. 249.

[7] Keith on Prophecy, ed. 8th, p. 388.

[8] 2 Pet. iii. 3, and Jude ver. 18.

[9] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 235.

So, if I worship God in my prayer, they will mock me, I shall pass for a fool. No matter for that: it must be done. I must call on God, and strive to walk with him. It is not necessary to have the favour of the world, nor to have riches, nor to live; but it is necessary to hold fast the truth, and to walk holily, to sanctify the name of our Lord, and to honour him, whether in life or death."[10] "Mind what Christ saith of them that are ashamed of him before men: he will be ashamed of them before his Father who is in heaven. Many are ashamed to pray before others, who are not ashamed to sin, curse, swear, get drunk, and break the Sabbath before others."[11]

But, whatever one may feel, as to praying beyond the domestic circle in which he every day moves, his sense of duty, his lawful authority, and his knowledge of the imperfections of those about him, should at least inspire him with sufficient fortitude to honour his God amidst his own household. "Why should you be ashamed to pray before your own family, those you continually converse with, and of whom you have the command? Will you have confidence to plead this frivolous excuse at the last judgment?"[12] "Multitudes allege that they shall meet from their families nothing but opposition, censure, and ridicule. Have you made the experiment? If not, where is your proof of its truth? If you have, have you attempted to remove it, and, like a wise and good man, determined to govern your family and subdue so unreasonable a spirit?" Again, many "have long neg-

[10] Archbishop Leighton, 1 Pet. iii. 15.
[11] Willison's Sabbath, p. 141.
[12] Ibid. p. 141.

lected prayer, and feel extreme reluctance to exhibit to their families their inconsistency of character. Concerning this, I shall only observe that it lies equally against all reformation, and, if yielded to, would effectually prevent every sinner from becoming a Christian,"[13] and be an insuperable obstacle to all improvement whatever.

"Those who have sufficient strength of mind to dare to be singular when worldly prudence requires it, would do well to raise their courage to a higher pitch, and venture to be religious even in the midst of irreligious connections."[14] "Where is the reason or the magnanimity of that mind that will let its conviction be either sacrificed or shaken by a jest? Stem the tide of wit and numbers, if you have reason and religion and the good of your souls embarked with you, rather than be borne down by a popular current."[15] "Invincibility of temper will often make even the scoffers themselves tired of the sport: they begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor sort of hostility to laugh. There is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain than their scorn. Till, however, a man becomes a veteran, he must reckon on sometimes meeting this trial."[16]

"Hath it not ever been the portion of good men to suffer in this kind? Was not our Lord himself, were not his apostles, were not all the prophets of old, were not all the heroes in goodness of all times, thus pursued with obloquy? What vile imputation, what name of

---

[13] Dwight's Theology, Eph. vi. 10.

[14] Mrs. Taylor's Hints, ed. 9th, p. 157.

[15] Dr. Gibbons's Hidden Life, ed. 3d, p. 187.

[16] Foster's Essays, ed. 8th, p. 129.

reproach, can be devised, wherewith the spiteful world did not besmear them? Yet were they much disturbed at it? No."[17] Nay, more, every kind of mockery, ill usage, and personal violence has been directed against the true worshippers of God, from the date of the earliest historical account which we have to the present day, but without overcoming the spirit that ruled in them.

Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt."[18] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego allowed themselves to be thrown into the fiery furnace,[19] rather than desert their duty to their God. Daniel[20] persisted in his devotional habits in spite of all the scorn, malignity, and power of the court of Babylon, and submitted to be cast into the lions' den rather than be guilty of impiety. The apostles and their fellow-believers also avowed and acted upon the principle that they "ought to obey God rather than men, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ."[21] All the Jewish history supports the testimony of Paul, when he said that the people of God "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword," &c.;[22] and all for the sake of their honest and intrepid adherence to true piety in the midst of ungodly society. They lived godly, and therefore suffered persecution.[23]

---

[17] Barrow's Sermons, 2 Cor. viii. 21.
[18] Heb. xi. 25, 26.
[19] Dan. iii. 16–18.
[20] Dan. vi. 11.
[21] Acts v. 29–41.
[22] Heb. xi. 36–38.
[23] 2 Tim. iii. 12.

We have one very remarkable instance of fearless devotion to the duties of religion, in the account which Josephus gives of the taking of Jerusalem by Pompey, the Roman general. Even Pompey himself "could not but admire that" the Jews "did not at all intermit their religious services, even when they were encompassed with darts on all sides; for, as if the city were in full peace, their daily sacrifices and purifications, and every branch of their religious worship, were still performed to God with the utmost exactness. Nor, indeed, when the temple was actually taken, and they were every day slain about the altar, did they leave off the instances of their divine worship that were appointed by their law. And now did many of the priests, even when they saw their enemies assailing them with swords in their hands, without any disturbance, go on with their divine worship, and were slain while they were offering their drink-offerings and burning their incense, as preferring the duties about their worship to God before their own preservation."[24] This a distinguished historian has pronounced "an instance of steady constancy scarce anywhere else to be thoroughly paralleled."[25]

During the first ten general persecutions which drenched the Christian Church with blood, many examples occurred of amazing intrepidity and firmness in adhering to the principles of the gospel, in spite of every artifice and cruelty which wickedness could devise to make believers apostatize from the truth. We have it from the authority of Pliny, the Roman governor, in his well-known letter to his master, the emperor Trajan, that

[24] Josephus' Wars of the Jews, by Whiston, b. i. c. 7, 4, 5.

[25] Prideaux's Connex., part ii. book 6.

"accusations, trials, and examinations were, and had been, going on against the Christians, in the provinces over which he presided, and that some boldly avowed their profession and died in the cause."[26] We have an instance of this kind in the history of Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna. On being asked by the Proconsul of Asia "to swear by the genius of Cæsar and blaspheme Christ, he resented it with a noble scorn, and said, 'Fourscore and six years have I served Christ, and he never did me any harm: how, then, shall I blaspheme my king and my Saviour?' On being desired to consider that unless he repented of his profession he would be committed to the flames, he answered, in the same spirit, 'Thou threatenest me with fire that burns for an hour and is presently extinct, but art ignorant, alas! of the fire of eternal damnation and the judgment to come, reserved for the wicked in the other world But why delayest thou? Bring forth whatever thou hast a mind to.' So far was he from cowardly sinking under the great threatenings made against him, that even the proconsul himself was astonished at him And the same sublime views supported him to the last. When tied to the stake to be burned, he poured out his soul to Heaven in a prayer of thanksgiving unto God for having brought him to that honour and distinction, and entreating admission into the society of the blessed martyrs and the presence of the Almighty on high."[27]

Justin Martyr and six of his companions acted much in the same way, and exactly in the same spirit of Chris-

---

[26] Pliny, in Paley's Evidences, part i. chap. 2.

[27] Cave's Life of Polycarp, p. 120.

tian intrepidity. "When threatened that unless they" sacrificed to the gods of the heathens they "should be tormented without mercy, 'There is nothing,' said Justin, 'which we more earnestly desire than to endure torments for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. For this is that which will promote our happiness and procure us confidence before the dreadful tribunal of our Lord and Saviour, before which, by the divine appointment, the whole world must appear.' To which the rest assented, adding, 'Despatch quickly what thou hast a mind to, for we are Christians, and cannot sacrifice to idols.' Whereupon the governor pronounced this sentence: 'They who refuse to do sacrifice to the gods and to obey the imperial edicts, let them be first scourged, and then beheaded, according to the laws.' The holy martyrs rejoiced and blessed God for the sentence passed upon them, and, being led back to prison, were accordingly whipped, and then beheaded."[28]

Multitudes of similar instances were constantly occurring in those times. Nay, the church has never for any long space of time been without instances in many respects resembling them. When we look into the History of Christian Martyrdom, or any faithfully written history of the church, we meet with innumerable examples of inflexible adherence to duty under every kind of seducing influence which the ingenuity of vice could invent. As one illustration of this truth, we may take the closing scene in the life of John Huss, who fell a victim, in 1415, to the persecuting spirit of Popish usurpation. He was tried and condemned by the Council of Constance for

[28] Cave's Life of Justin Martyr, p. 151.

holding what the Church of Rome termed heretical doctrines, though they were more scriptural than its own. Even his persecutors were "greatly astonished at the strength of his resolution. When he had reached the place of execution, he fell on his knees, sung several portions of the Psalms, looked steadfastly towards heaven, and repeated, 'Into thy hands, O Lord, do I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O most good and faithful God.' When the fagots were piled around him, the Duke of Bavaria desired him to abjure. 'No,' said he: 'I never preached any doctrine of an evil tendency; and what I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood.' As soon as the fagots were lighted, the heroic martyr sung a hymn, with so loud and cheerful a voice that he was heard through all the cracklings of the combustibles and the noise of the multitude. At length his voice was interrupted by the flames, which soon put a period to his life."[29] His friend Jerome of Prague, who was condemned for the same opinions by the same council, after a little faltering and compliance with the wishes of his enemies, also bore his dying testimony to the cause of God. "Their utmost endeavours to bring him over" at last "all proved ineffectual," and he "resolved to seal his doctrine with his blood. When the flames enveloped him, he sung a hymn; and the last words he was heard to say were, 'This soul in flames I offer, Christ, to thee.'"[30]

Many similar scenes were witnessed in every country in Europe over which Romish usurpation extended, till

[29] Fox's History of Christian Martyrdom, ed. 1824, pp. 172, 173.

[30] Jerome of Prague, in Fox's History of Christian Martyrdom, p. 175.

the ascendency of Protestant principles was established and spiritual liberty thereby secured. Since then, with few exceptions, the spirit of public persecution, on an extensive scale, has been unknown, though still the conscientious worshipper has, everywhere, to encounter more or less of the wiles and wickedness of the enemies of the truth, in holding fast his faith.

But all the hardships arising from thus adhering inflexibly to the cause of godliness are nothing to the miseries produced by a mean compliance with the wishes of those who hate the truth. In this case the conscience becomes the sufferer; and "a wounded spirit who can bear?" A sad instance of this, even in a good man, is recorded in the life of Archbishop Cranmer. He was tempted to yield for a time to the solicitations of his enemies, and to abjure his Protestant opinions. But then he was indeed "in a miserable case, having neither inwardly any quietness in his own conscience, nor yet outwardly any help in his adversaries. Besides this, on the one side was praise, on the other side scorn, on both sides danger, so that he could neither die honestly nor yet honestly live. And whereas he sought profit, he fell into double disprofit, that neither with good men he could avoid secret shame, nor yet with evil men the note of dissimulation."[31] The misery which played upon his spirit, in consequence of his not standing fast to the truth, was so great that he could not bear it, but resolved to get rid of it, by returning to the profession of the principles which he had abjured, and dying in support of them. With this determination, he made a public

[31] Fox's History of Christian Martyrdom, p. 537.

avowal of his faith, and was condemned to be burnt as a heretic, though under the pretence of his having been guilty of certain state crimes laid to his charge. "When the wood was kindled, and the fire began to burn near him, he stretched forth his right hand, which had signed his recantation," or the paper in which he had abjured Protestant opinions, "into the flames, and there held it so steadfast that all the people might see it burn to a coal before his body was touched. In short, he was so patient and constant in the midst of those extreme tortures, that he seemed to move no more than the stake to which he was bound; his eyes were lifted up to heaven, and often he repeated, 'This unworthy right hand!' so long as his voice would suffer him; and as often used the words of the blessed martyr Stephen, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' till, the fury of the flames putting him to silence, he gave up the ghost."[32]

Many a living man has felt some portion of the acute misery of mind which the archbishop experienced in consequence of unworthy compliance with the will of the wicked, and hence has learned the value of consistency and firmness in adhering to what is right. He who is faithful and fearless in duty, in all circumstances, has always the approbation of God, and peace in his own mind, to support him under the ills of life, and often commands the respect, the confidence and good offices of men. Of this we may take one instance from Roman history. "Eusebius relates" of the emperor Constantius, that "while his colleagues were persecuting the Christians with fire and sword, he politically pretended to per-

[32] Fox's History of Christian Martyrdom, pp. 543, 544.

secute them too, and declared to such officers of his household and governors of provinces as were Christians, that he left it to their choice either to sacrifice to the gods, and by that means maintain themselves in their employments, or to forfeit their places and his favour by continuing steady in their religion. When they had all declared, the emperor discovered his real sentiments; reproached, in most bitter terms, those who had renounced their religion; highly extolled the virtue and constancy of such as had despised the wealth and vanities of the world; dismissed with ignominy the former, saying that 'those who had betrayed their God would not scruple to betray their prince,' and, retaining the latter, trusted them with the guard of his person and the whole management of public affairs, as persons on whose fidelity he could depend, and in whom he might repose an entire confidence, and thus filled his palace with pious adorers of the true God."[33]

Many less striking examples of the temporal rewards of intrepid and steady devotion to duty, both in history and daily life, might easily be mentioned. But it is needless to specify any more.

But, whether such advantages arise from this mode of acting or not, still, both reason and Scripture tell every one that he ought to be faithful and leave the issue to God, who will not allow any to serve him in vain. Milton's account of the angel Abdiel is a fine description of what every Christian should be, even in the most trying circumstances,—

---

[33] Ancient Universal History, vol. xv. pp. 524, 525.

"faithful found,
Among the faithless, faithful only he,
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal:
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought,
To swerve from truth or change his constant mind,
Though single."[34]

How like to this was the conduct of Elijah when he would not join in the idolatry of his countrymen! "In Baal's interest were four hundred and fifty priests, besides the king and many of his subjects. On the part of Jehovah there was none but Elijah; and yet, though he stood alone, he possessed an unshaken courage and displayed a peculiar majesty of deportment."[35] In short, the more ungodliness prevails in society, just so much the more need is there for those who are the light and salt of the world to stand fast in their allegiance to their heavenly Lord, and prevent, so far as their example and influence can go, universal darkness and incurable corruption from overspreading the earth. Just so much the more need is there for the true worshippers of God to show themselves fearlessly as his people, and become as it were rallying-points, around which the weak and the wavering may be gathered, and by means of which all may be rendered stronger, steadier, and more decided and active in the cause of truth.

Neither the fear nor the favour of man, then, should ever be allowed to make us cold in the service, or negligent of the worship, of the true and living God; for

---

[34] Milton's Paradise Lost, book v. l. 896.

[35] Robinson's Scripture Characters, abridged, ed. 1816, p. 248.

nothing can excuse us in neglecting a duty which depends on no man's will, and which would be equally binding upon us whether all the millions of mankind went along with us in the performance of it, or all were against us and all tormenting us on account of our attention to it. Let us, therefore, never be afraid or ashamed to honour Him before men who was not afraid nor ashamed to die for us upon the cross, nor is now afraid nor ashamed to intercede for us in the highest place of glory and in the presence of his Father and all the host of heaven.

3. A third cause of the neglect of prayer is a sinful attachment to the things of this world,—too much love to its gains and pursuits, its pleasures and ungodly ways.

It was formerly observed that the heart was in a wrong state by nature, and that from its being so, all other causes of impiety derive their force. This is peculiarly manifest from the readiness with which the unreformed part of mankind turn away from every thing godly when presented to them, and devote themselves to earthly and sinful concerns. "Where the renewed heart is, worship is not so much a duty as a privilege and a pleasure. There is a panting after God, a contention to be near him, to find him always, and not even to lose sight of him. Hence the turning of the heart to him amidst the cares of life, and hence the attendance upon him in the stated acts of public and retired devotion."[1] But where the unrenewed heart is, the very reverse is the case. "God is not in all its thoughts:"[2] the world only is there.

The prayerless "know not how to pray, how to speak

---

[1] Walker's Christian, p. 234.

[2] Ps. x. 4.

to their God, because they do not love him. When the heart loves, it soon finds out how to communicate its feelings. Let us substitute God in place of the world, then shall our heart be no longer a stranger before God."[3] "It is an indication that we love" even "the good things of this life too much, when we are not thankful for them and forget to make our acknowledgments to Him at whose hand we hold them."[4]

"Look into the conduct of mankind, even of professing Christians, and you will see that visible and temporal things appear to them most weighty, unseen and eternal things most trifling. They are diligent in trading, but negligent in praying."[5] Nay, in thousands, "natural propensity and inclination to the things of this world are so strong and prevalent that they will not suffer themselves to think seriously upon, much less to concern themselves about, any thing else."[6] It was well observed by Limborch that, "being wholly occupied with the love of the world, and destitute of the love of God, we cannot raise our hearts aright to God, just as the eye cannot at the same moment take into its view both heaven and earth."[7] "The worldling is so taken up with earthly things that he hath neither heart, nor mind, nor time for heavenly. But as in Pharaoh's dream the lean kine ate up the fat ones, so this lean and barren earth doth eat up all the thoughts of heaven."[8] "The cares of the world,

---

[3] Massillon's Sermons, Matt. xv. 22.
[4] Mason's Serm., No. 3.
[5] Orton on Eternity, p. 28.
[6] Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts, p. 223.
[7] Limborchi Theo., lib. v. cap. 27, sect. 10.
[8] Baxter's Call, p. 168.

and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, entering into the mind, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful."[9] "At whatever point we come in contact with the world, it wounds our peace and impedes the prospect of futurity. Its cares, its ease, its loss, its gains, its joys and its sorrows, its reverses and its prosperity, are dangerous to virtue, and assail the existence of grace. The spirit of the world is most contrary to the spirit of Christ; and in proportion as a worldly temper gets the ascendency, all grace and heavenliness of frame subside; we grow callous to religion, and gradually settle down into confirmed and fearless ungodliness."[10]

"How universal is it among those who are in pursuit of wealth, to make gold their hope, and among those who are in possession of wealth, to make fine gold their confidence! Yet we are told[11] that this is virtually as complete a renunciation of God as to practise some of the worst charms of idolatry. And it might perhaps serve to unsettle the vanity of those who, unsuspicious of the disease that is in their hearts, are wholly given over to this world, and wholly without alarm in their anticipations of another, could we convince them that the most reigning and restless desire by which they are actuated stamps the same perversity on them in the sight of God, as he sees to be in those who are worshippers of the sun in the firmament or are offering incense to the moon as the queen of heaven."[12] "Whosoever, therefore, will be the friend of the world is the enemy

---

[9] Mark iv. 19.
[10] Sievewright's Serm., 1 John v. 4.
[11] Job xxxi. 24–28.
[12] Chalmers's Commercial Serm., p. 248.

of God."[13] And what will a man gain by this but a dreadful end?

Besides, "if a man were lord of infinite worlds, and possessed infinite riches, if they were at last to end, and he leave them, they were to be valued as nothing; and if all things temporal have this evil property, to fade and perish, they ought to have no more esteem than if they were not. Temporal goods may perish, be stolen, and lost many ways; but spiritual goods can only be forsaken, and are then only lost when we leave them by our sins."[14] "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"[15] "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil."[16] Therefore, "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."[17]

Attachment to the pleasures of the world, particularly sensual indulgences, is also equally destructive of devotion to God. "There is absolutely nothing in the human heart, when once hardened by the pleasures and dissipations of the world, in which the blessed seed of the gospel can have a chance to germinate."[18] Nay, "living in any known sin is a grand impediment to a heavenly conversation,"[19] as was formerly pointed out.[20]

---

[13] James iv. 4.

[14] Bishop Taylor's Contemplations, b. i. chap. 1, 2.

[15] Matt. xvi. 26. [16] 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. [17] 1 John ii. 15.

[18] Suttleworth's Serm., John vii. 17.

[19] Baxter's Saint's Rest, p. 183. [20] Chap. v. 4.

It was well observed by Bishop Burnet, in his conversations with Lord Rochester, that "the main root of all corruption in principle was a dissolute life, which, as it darkened men's minds, and incapacitated them for discovering better things, so it made it necessary for them to seek out such opinions as might quiet their alarms and shelter them from the accusations of their own hearts."[21] "A man resolvedly wicked, or resolved not to forsake his lusts, must quit those opinions which cross them."[22] Accordingly, we actually find in daily life that those who are "resolved to persevere in sinful gratifications abandon religion, without further reflection or inquiry, as a yoke of bondage which they are neither able nor willing to bear."[23] "Every wicked soul is desirous to keep at a distance, as it were, from the Most Holy, and is unwilling so much as to look towards the place where his perfections may be seen. The evil desires, also, of an impure heart, rising like noxious vapours through the whole inward man, so darken and debilitate the eye of the mind that it cannot discern spiritual things at all, nor perceive the most visible manifestations of the divine glory."[24] They who move in such "a carnal worldly element cannot bear the light of holy truth and the doctrines which are according to godliness; and, consequently, their search will be, if they search at all, after those principles which are most indulgent to the ways they like. Thus infidel principles are embraced by many, in order to obtain a quieter

[21] Crichton's Converts, vol. i. p. 43.
[22] Barrow's Sermons, Heb. iii. 12.
[23] Thomson on Infidelity, p. 52.
[24] Brewster's Lectures, Matt. v. 8.

retreat from the reproaches of truth, the light of which they cannot or will not endure; because they are determined to make no costly sacrifices, to renounce no carnal indulgences."[25]

"Multitudes have abandoned even the very form of prayer, because it laid an intolerable restraint on them in the pursuit of some favourite enjoyment."[26] The language of every one in this sensualized state, when he speaks what he really feels, is, and must be, "I dislike prayer. It puts a restraint on all my ways. It compels me to think of that which I would rather forget." "But," to such it may be said, "what are you thus owning yourself to be? It is the character of the wicked, 'God is not in all their thoughts;' they dislike to retain God in their knowledge. Ah! remember, at one time or other all flesh must come before him."[27]

Some grow so hardened and stupid, under the influence of sinful worldly habits, that they even "venture to say, I am too wicked to pray. 'The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.' Is it my duty to pray while unregenerate? But he who thinks that he shall get rid of the duty of prayer on account of his wickedness, does not only confess, but aggravate, his guilt and his condemnation. You must not, indeed, come with the same wicked mind with which you committed your sins, but go grieved and penitent; and the sooner you go the better. It is your duty to pray, though unregenerate, and to pray especially for a new heart. Who more wicked than Simon Magus? And yet the apostle

---

[25] Williams's Calvinism, chap. vii. 11.
[26] Gordon's Serm., Dan. ix. 20–23.
[27] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 25.

calls on him to repent and pray to God. Your guilt should bring you to the Saviour, and not keep you from him. Will not the sick man desire to see the physician? Is keeping at a distance, and contemptuous and negligent conduct in an offender, as likely to gain the favour of him that is offended, as a humble and meek confession of fault and entreaty for pardon?"[28] This is nothing else than the scornful indifference and sottishness of the ancient sensualists, who said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die;"[29] "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy way. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?"[30]

In this manner, "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."[31] "A deceived heart hath turned them aside, that they cannot say, Is there not a lie in our right hand?"[32] For the gratification of their appetites and desires, of their worldly-heartedness, they forget their God, and hate their duty, and live as fools, and die as beasts, and go away at last into endless misery,—a sad, unenviable end, surely, of the pleasures of sin!

There is a great proportion of the prayerless, however, that are not thus hardened in iniquity, but are still great sinners, and feel that they have preferred the world to God, and have not faith and sufficient courage, on that account, to draw near in prayer to Him whom they are conscious they have offended. They have indulged in

---

[28] Bickersteth on Prayer, pp. 23, 24.
[29] Isa. xxii. 13.
[30] Job xxi. 14, 15; Jer. xviii. 12.
[31] 2 Tim. iii. 13.
[32] Isa. xliv. 20.

many sinful pleasures, engaged in many sinful pursuits, and devoted their hearts to many sinful objects, and thereby have[33] departed from the living God, and strengthened their unbelief, and[34] darkened their understanding, till they cannot see the way back to their Father's house, and are filled with tears and misgivings of mind, that will not even allow them to seek his returning love. "God," say they, "is holy, and holy men may find admittance and protection. But can so vile a sinner as I look to be protected and taken under his safeguard? Go try. Knock at his door, and take it not on your own word, but on his:[35] it shall be opened to thee."[36] But "I am a person singularly sinful, beyond any I know. Therefore I dare not presume to go near to Christ Jesus. Is your sin beyond the drunkenness and incest of Lot, adultery covered with murder in David, idolatry and horrid apostasy in Solomon, idolatry, murder, and witchcraft in Manasseh, anger against God and his way in Jonah, forswearing of Christ in Peter, after he was forewarned and had vowed the contrary, and bloody persecution in Paul, making the saints to blaspheme? Yet all these obtained pardon through Christ, as the Scripture doth show."[37] "Even let it be supposed that your conscience has been writing the bitterest things against you, that your transgressions appear to you in the most aggravated colours, that a conviction of utter unworthiness has taken possession of your soul, and that you are afraid to look to

---

[33] Heb. iii. 12. [34] Eph. iv. 18. [35] Matt. vii. 7.

[36] Archbishop Leighton on 1 Pet. iii. 15.

[37] Guthrie's Great Interest, pp. 221, 222.

God, or to ask from him the pardon, the sanctification, the comfort, of which you are as undeserving as you are needful; still I must exhort you to have recourse to his throne, and to take encouragement from this, that it is 'the throne of grace.' The righteous Lord sits upon that throne; but his face has no frown upon it, his voice has no terror in it. On whatever part of that throne you cast your eye, you see it inscribed with grace in all its variety of application to your circumstances. There is grace to blot out your trespasses, though they be 'red like crimson.' There is grace to purify your hearts, though they be 'full of all uncleanness.' There is grace to subdue your enemies, though they 'come upon you as a flood.' There is grace to console you amidst all your sorrows, though they be great and multiplied and protracted. There is grace to guide you through life, to cheer you at death, and to carry you to heaven. And as surely as God sits upon that throne of grace, so surely will he listen to the prayers that you prefer at his footstool, and uphold the character which he himself has enstamped upon it, by freely tendering and imparting to you whatsoever you ask in sincerity and faith."[38]

"Come unto me," said our gracious Redeemer, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;"[39] "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."[40] "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens

---

[38] Thomson's Posthum. Serm., Matt. vii. 7.
[39] Matt. xi. 28, 29. [40] Matt. ix. 13.

under her wings, and ye would not!"[41] "Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;"[42] for "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."[43]

Wherever, then, there is such an attachment to the gains and pleasures of this world as to alienate the mind from God and blind its views of the gospel scheme of salvation, so as to make it either regardless of its state or afraid to apply for mercy, it is evident that there is a most active and dangerous cause of impiety in operation, preventing the exercise of the spirit of prayer. The Spirit of God alone can destroy this evil power within, and impart that faith to the soul which insures victory over the world.[44] But if we seek his aid it will be given to us, and we shall finally overcome. Let us, then, earnestly seek his divine and spiritualizing influences, and labour to "set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth."[45]

---

[41] Matt. xxiii. 37. [42] Isa. i. 18. [43] John vi. 37.
[44] 1 John v. 4. [45] Col. iii. 2.

CONCLUDING ADDRESSES.

From a general view of the foregoing remarks, we are naturally led to turn our attention to the four following descriptions of persons:—those who habitually neglect and despise prayer; those who are in a wavering, hesitating, or undecided state of mind regarding it; those who pray as mere formalists; and those who worship in the true spirit of prayer.

1. As to you who neglect and despise the duty of prayer, every testimony, in every part of these pages, is against you, and the whole investigation clearly shows your conduct to be bad, and your state dangerous.

Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, have all witnessed against you. Mere uninspired testimony has also been called in and heard; and it has proved equally unfavourable to your cause. Distinguished divines, and others of acknowledged attainments in religion (all of whom, from their attention to the subject, and consequent knowledge of it, ought to be listened to with deference, and these, too, not selected from any particular age or sect, but brought forward from almost every period of the history of Christianity and almost every denomination of believers), have all expressed their disapprobation of your godless manner of life. Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, heathens, and infidels—a promiscuous crowd, including both friends and foes, and persons of

almost every age and nation and station in life and variety of opinion—have convicted you of a sin against nature, and against God, the Author and Preserver of your being.

Is there nothing in all this that should lead you to suspect that you are travelling in a wrong and perilous path? If this "cloud of witnesses" comprehended none or but few of the most enlightened part of mankind, or of those most competent to judge of such a question as that which we have been considering, then you might have recourse to the plea that "the opinion of the multitude is the worst kind of argument,"[1] or evidence, that could be used, as the mass of the people have "nothing to defend them but their numbers,"[2] in the crude notions which they adopt. But here the brightest lights of the world, and even the light of heaven, the most eminent judges, inspired and uninspired, and God himself, "the Father of lights," all stand opposed to you. Surely, then, common prudence should suggest to you that there must be danger in your path, and that you should "cease from your evil ways, and return unto the Lord whom you have forsaken." This is evidently the duty and the interest of every prayerless person, even when his guilt has not been increased by other aggravating acts of impiety.

But the necessity of a change like this becomes much more evident and imperative when, in addition to the simple neglect of prayer, you have been guilty of indulging secret malice, or expressing open contempt of the duty and of those who attend to it, and of doing all

[1] Seneca de Vit. lib. ii. [2] Juvenal, Sat. ii. 45.

you could, by ridicule, by reproach, by neglect and other discouraging means, to render others as regardless of it as yourselves, and thereby prevent them from offering unto God the honour which is due to his great name. In this case, you not only withhold your homage from Him who has given you all your blessings, and stretch forth no friendly hand to help others to come to him, but you also actively oppose his will, fill the minds of the undecided with painful doubts and reflections, and do what you can to make them ashamed of his worship, to destroy their comfort and usefulness in time, and to render them miserable through all eternity,—wretched without end. Nay, your guilt acquires a still deeper dye of criminality, from the low malignant pleasure which you enjoy in thus wounding their peace, in "scattering firebrands and death" among them, and in witnessing the success of your wanton, gratuitous wickedness. Like Satan himself, whose vile and ruinous work you are performing, you first take pleasure in tempting, and then you exult in surveying the guilt and the misery which your temptations produce.

But triumph not. Your day of retribution is drawing near, and your wickedness shall have its due. You may laugh now, and by your "cruel mockings" unfeelingly inflict many wounds into the minds of modest worshippers about you. Yet the time is assuredly coming when you shall "howl and weep" at the remembrance of such impiety. You may "walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes," and hold the worship and the worshippers of the Most High "in derision;" but "for all these things God will bring you to judgment." All your "ungodly speeches," all your "unrighteous

thoughts," and all your zeal for sin, will then rise up from the depths of oblivion, in which you thought they were buried forever, and will stand around you as accusing ghosts, and avengers of all whom you have injured.

With so direful a certainty before you, how deplorable must that infatuation be which still keeps you in a prayerless state! While you continue so deluded, all that man can say to you must be unavailing. The more earnestly you are urged to consider your ways and turn to God, so much the more bitter grows your contempt and so much the louder rise the shouts of your mockery. But, "whether you will hear or whether you will forbear," it is the command of the Almighty to his servants that they tell you of your guilt, that they warn you of your danger, and that they call upon you and "beseech you, in Christ's stead," to forsake your sins, and "be reconciled to God" through "the blood of the Lamb." Oh, reject not, then, the counsel that would lead you to pardon and to peace. Be advised, before it be too late, "to flee from the wrath to come." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Arise and call upon him."

"Delay not till death has formed an impassable gulf between you and your Maker. You are now not far from the graves, where the dust of many of your fathers and your neighbours and your friends is reposing in awful and unbroken silence. And you know not how soon, you know not how suddenly, your dust shall be mingled with theirs. Oh, then, improve this the 'day of your merci-

ful visitation,' and 'harden not your hearts.' Live no longer 'without God in the world.' Let it not be said of any one of you, when you are sleeping in the earth, 'This is the grave of one who once had free access to the throne of grace, but never went to it,—never bent his knees,—never lifted up his eye to heaven,—never uttered a devout petition,—never conceived one cordial wish for the salvation of his soul. And now the ear of mercy is shut, and the power of addressing it is gone forever.' O thoughtless and prayerless sinner, return unto Him whom you have forsaken, and away from whom you can have no comfort in distress, no happiness in life, no hope at the hour of dissolution. Return to him; return to him with your whole heart; return to him through Jesus Christ, who is 'the true and living way,' and he will 'receive you graciously,' he will 'love you freely,' he will put into your heart 'the spirit of grace and supplication,' he will guide you through the wilderness in which you are now wandering with heedless steps, and he will at length conduct you into the land of promise and of eternal rest."[3]

2. As to you who are in a wavering, hesitating, or undecided state of mind regarding prayer, "why halt ye between two opinions?" Why do you still hesitate about the performance of a duty so clearly marked out, and so powerfully supported by the best reasons and authorities? Is it because there is a want of decision in the natural temper of your minds? If so, it is to be lamented. But to lament it is not enough. You must strive to acquire more energy and hardihood of character if you wish to bear the cross and act the part of true soldiers of Jesus

[3] Dr. Andrew Thomson's Posthumous Sermons, James v. 13.

Christ. Consider the danger you incur by giving way to this unmanly and unchristian state of feeling. You are assured by Him who cannot err, that if you put your "hand to the plough and look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of heaven." There is, then, only one other place that you can be fit for. But are you willing to go to that place? If heaven and hell were this moment laid open to your view, and you were required to decide which of them you should choose, it is certain that you would not hesitate for a single instant about which of them you ought to prefer. Why, then, do you feel any difficulty in making an immediate choice of the mode of life which you know must lead to the one or the other? Both are but a very little distance from you on the road of life, and by neglecting, or attending to, the directions laid down in God's word, a summary of which is contained in the preceding pages, you may reach the one or the other, just as you make your choice. Surely, then, the importance of decision, and the danger of indecision, when so much is at stake, should rouse you to make every effort to overcome this infirmity. The Spirit of God has enabled thousands as weak as you are, and even weaker, to overcome it; and there is nothing in your case to prevent him from enabling you to do the same. Only earnestly seek from him light and strength, and use every other means of becoming decided and steadfast, and you must succeed.

But there is too much reason to suspect that most of you are rendered irresolute by other causes. Are not many of you influenced by the love of some favourite sin? You think that if you were to enter upon a life of prayer you would be obliged to part with your sinful

pleasures and pursuits, and regulate your conduct by very different principles from those which you now act upon; and certainly so you would, if you prayed aright. But this, instead of being a good reason for neglecting prayer, is the very strongest argument you could use for beginning to pray, without a moment's delay; for the sooner you renounce every thing sinful in your manner of life, the safer and happier you must be. It is utter madness to balance between the pleasures of sin and the happiness of holiness. Will you hold fast by sin and go to hell, rather than give it up and go to heaven? This is the true undisguised state of the case. Let it alarm you, and persuade you to break off your sins by repentance and immediately live for eternity.

But by becoming decidedly devoted to God you are perhaps afraid of giving offence to ungodly persons, who have laid you under obligations to them by acts of kindness, and who have it in their power to help or hurt you in your worldly affairs. It is, no doubt, distressing to think that those who have been your friends should become your enemies, on account of a change in your mode of life which should render you more worthy of their friendship. But when such conflicting claims between the pretensions of men and the rights of God occur, there is no room left for a single moment's deliberation about which you ought to prefer. Are you not under infinitely greater obligations to God than to all other friends you ever had? And has not he infinitely more power than all mankind to afflict or bless you? Will the ungodly be more steady and true to your interests than he? Persons of their character were never yet true to any thing but their own selfishness; and your fear of

offending them by becoming more harmless, honourable, and useful members of society shows your conviction of their capricious and faithless tempers. If the entanglements of such are around you, the sooner you burst them the better. No man whose favour you ought to value and seek to retain will think the worse of you for being honest and decided in your principles, for firmly and faithfully honouring your God. If you lose any one's esteem and good offices by acting in this manner, He whom you serve will raise up others of a better spirit to befriend you, and abundantly reward you, in some way or other, for your faithfulness.

Perhaps, too, you wish to avoid the laugh of scoffers, and the names of contempt and calumny which they heap upon all that truly worship God. But have they not laughed at you already? Are they not now laughing at you, and that, too, for being so weak and wavering, so simple and credulous, as to think that you can ever so act as to escape their laugh? If you labour to secure their good opinion, it will be the hardest and most hopeless task that ever you did or can attempt, even in this world of difficulties. The more you concede to them, so much the more they will require of you, and so much the more ridiculous and contemptible you will become in their eyes. There never was, and there never will be, a time, in the history of fallen man, when there were not, and when there will not be, "scoffers, walking after their own lusts," and treating the people of God with scorn. The patriarchs and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, and all the wise and the good, had their full share of "cruel mockings," malicious calumnies, and contemptuous treatment. But did this overcome their courage and make

them shrink from duty? No. Why, then, should you shrink, when you know that, like them, you must encounter the tongues of the wicked? If Lot seemed to the inhabitants of Sodom as one that mocked, if David was taunted for dancing before the Lord, by Saul's daughter, if Paul was termed a babbler by the men of Athens, and if even our Saviour himself was declared, by the unbelieving Jews, to be mad, to be a Samaritan, and to have a devil, how can you expect to escape, act as you may, from the ridicule, the taunts, the calumnies and contemptuous epithets of worldly-hearted and godless men? Whatever way you may conduct yourselves, you can make no faithful friends of such persons; and seeking their friendship, you lose that of God, and Gŏd's people, and sacrifice your own peace and comfort of mind, and, after all, find yourselves disappointed. You "sow the wind and reap the whirlwind."

Your honour, your interest, and your duty are all on the side of prayer; and all combine to show the necessity of casting away "the fear of man that bringeth a snare," and of being decided, steady, and consistent in "serving the Lord."[1] "Fear not, then, the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings; for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool." But "they that wait upon the Lord shall go on from strength to strength, till every one of them appear before him in Zion." "Be ye, therefore, steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

[1] See, also, Isa. li. 12, &c.

3. As to you who pray as mere formalists, why do you satisfy yourselves with so imperfect and unacceptable a homage? You have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." You "have a name that you live, and are dead." So had the formal, hypocritical Pharisee, and so had the ancient Jewish formalists, who "drew near to God, and honoured him with their lips, when their hearts were far from him." Against all these God's severest displeasure was denounced; and the same denunciations equally stand against you. Your regular returns of the hours of worship, your punctual observance of the various parts of the service which you may have prescribed to yourselves, and your habitual solemnity of manner in going over it, while your souls are not in the work, are all unavailing in the sight of Him, who searcheth the heart" and requireth "truth, in the inward parts." When there is a want of life and warmth and earnestness, there the outward form is of no more value than the body when deserted by the soul. And yet you take merit to yourselves for this regular mockery of God! You "pray with a secret hope that prayer will excuse sin and be accepted instead of reformation." But you must surely be aware that "acquiescence in the bare act of prayer is a most dangerous delusion, and keeps the soul from its proper relief."[1] "This is a common, but a strange, mistake. What merit can there be in begging and seeking that which, if we obtain, lays us under increased obligations? Be not mistaken: though it is good in its proper place, it is not good in the way of meriting any thing from God,"[2] even when in all respects

[1] Adams's Private Thoughts, 252, 250.

[2] Bickersteth on Prayer, p. 26.

offered up as God requires. The very "promise of giving lets us know that our prayers are not meritorious,"[3] and, therefore, not to be trusted to, or made a ground of self-satisfaction.

Not only, however, do you take merit to yourselves for the formal punctuality of your outward worship, but even despise others as less righteous, in this respect, than yourselves. In this you imitate the self-conceited Pharisee, who condemned the humble publican, and took merit to himself for tithing "mint, and anise, and cummin," though he neglected "the weightier matters of the law." That worthless hypocritical sect, of which he was a member, "devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers." In like manner, with all the parade of outward sanctity and attention to times and forms of devotion, you secretly cherish a spirit of avarice, oppression, and duplicity in your hearts, and wait your opportunity to cheat the unsuspecting and take advantage of the needy and the friendless. How can you think of such acts of insincerity, inconsistency, and injustice, and still trust to the imaginary merit of your lifeless formalities? You may have a zeal for particular doctrines and observances, which are good enough in themselves, and therefore you may flatter yourselves that you are more righteous than others; but while your hearts are not right with God, you may rest assured that, in all this, you are only deceiving yourselves, and "the truth is not in you."

Even simple formality will condemn you before God; for he looks for the sincere homage of the soul, of which

[3] Poole's Annotations, Matt. vii. 7.

the outward form was only intended to be the sign, or expression. If the sign be substituted for the thing signified, this must be offensive to Him who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. But when, in addition to this, you cherish, as all formalists more or less do, a spirit of pride, selfishness, and iniquity, the mask which you wear becomes still more hateful and criminal, and your danger more certain and imminent. This is evident from the whole of the foregoing investigation, especially those parts of it which refer to the requisites of acceptable prayer, where the evils of not praying aright are made manifest.

Rest not, then, in mere formal observances. Neglect not the outward form; but be not satisfied with it alone; far less take merit to yourselves on that account. Give up your hearts freely and entirely to your God, and let the visible act be a true manifestation of the feeling of devotion working in your souls. Disdain the applause of those who speak well of you merely for the regularity of your lifeless formalities, when your conscience tells you that you deserve it not, and that He who judges aright cannot be pleased with so heartless a homage. Seek his approbation in sincerity and truth, and never perform your devotions "to be seen of men" or to "make a gain of godliness." Let not your prayers be only a cold collection of words; nor let them be the dull mechanical effect of mere habit; but let them be the real breathing and utterance of souls feeling deeply the solemnity of their situation, and longing intensely for more and more of the manifestations of God's favour.

4. As to you who worship in the true spirit of prayer, it is pleasing to contemplate the victory which you have

gained over the world, and to think of the progress you are making, both in the exercises and enjoyments of pure and undefiled religion. "The anointing which ye have received of God abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you," as those require to be taught who have now been addressed. Still, "the word of exhortation" is not unnecessary even to you. "Suffer" it, then, and set your hearts to profit by it.

"Let that abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning." Seasons of temptation yet await you, in which you will have need for all your steadfastness and perseverance. The enemies of religion will yet assail you both openly and secretly; doubts and fears and evil affections will yet arise in your own minds; the outward concerns of your situation will be apt to engross more of your attention and regard than belongs to them; the languor of nature, too, will often enfeeble your devotional exertions; and, at times, God himself will withdraw so much of his support as will make you feel how weak and helpless you are in yourselves, and how entirely you are dependent on him for the supply of every want. In such cases, when they occur, it becomes you to keep in mind that your "sufficiency is of God," and that you ought to continue "instant in prayer," even though the exercise be much at variance with the state of your feelings. Persevere, and you will be sure to recover your energy, warmth, and sensibility. Imitate the example of Luther, who, when he found himself in a dull and devotionless temper, persevered in prayer "till he prayed his heart into the frame he prayed for."[1] "Be not

[1] Hill's It is Well, p. 177.

weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not."

But remember, also, that it is part of your Christian obligations to do what you can to strengthen others by your counsel, example, and influence. Many who are exposed to temptation, and have but weak principles and timid minds, have much need of your countenance and friendly offices. You yourselves were once feeble in the godly life, and felt the advantage of such support and encouragement from those who were stronger and more experienced in the faith than you then were. Even more advanced believers often require help from each other, to keep up the fervour of their piety and strengthen the "things that are ready to die." Wherever, then, you can impart any benefit in any of these ways, let not your soul be sparing of its efforts, but let it be as your "meat and your drink," to do good to all whom you can thus assist, and thereby glorify "your Father in heaven."

Labour, also, to bring those to Christ who are far off, and know him not, and desire not the blessings which he bestows. Avail yourselves of every opportunity and use all suitable means to instruct them in the truth and turn them from the error of their ways. While any ray of hope remains, cease not to study how you may lead them to the Saviour and do good to their souls. And towards those whom you have no hope of persuading to renounce their follies and to walk in the ways of wisdom, endeavour to conduct yourselves continually in such a manner as not to allow "your good to be evil spoken of." You know that their eyes are upon you for evil, and nothing will they overlook that they can turn against

you and the cause in which you are engaged. When you can do them good in any way, delay not to do it. When they do you harm, forgive them, and show them an example of the way in which the truly godly act in overcoming evil with good. Finally, if it be possible, "avoid every appearance of evil," and, trusting to divine aid, ever study by "well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

PRAYER.

O most gracious God, who upholdest the weak and guidest them that seek thee, to thee I desire to render thanksgiving and praise for the support and direction which it hath pleased thee to grant to thy servant in this attempt to plead thy cause. Accept of his gratitude, imperfect though it be, and give him to see thy blessing resting on the labour of his hands.

Oh, may the Holy Spirit carry home some part of what has now been attempted to the hearts of the prayerless, that they may have a sense of their guilt and danger, and earnestly seek for pardon and peace through the Saviour of sinners. May it help to make the timid and the wavering more decided in the truth, that they may not be overcome by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare, and become ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. May it touch the consciences of those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, that they may feel the necessity of worshipping thee, who art a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. May it even be useful to thy true worshippers, as the means of quickening their diligence in thy work when they begin to grow faint and weary, and of warming their love to thee when

ready to wax cold and languish. Though powerless in itself, O Lord, thou canst make it prosper in all to whom thou sendest it. Oh, may it be as good seed springing up unto eternal life. To thine all-wise disposal, O thou Almighty Disposer of all things, I now commit it. May it be for thy glory, and the good of many souls. Pardon its imperfections; render its errors harmless; and make its truths impressive and profitable. Hear me in these things, O my God, forgive my sins, and give me an answer in peace, and bless me forever, for Christ's sake. Amen.

NOTE REFERRED TO p. 38.

The following questions, published by the Rev. W. Crotty, in 1837, form a good answer to the Roman Catholic taunt, so often addressed to Protestants, viz.: "Where was your religion before Luther?"—though the best answer still is, "It was in the Bible:"—

"Will any of the Priests come forward and give a satisfactory reply to the following queries.

"Where was the Popedom before Boniface III., in the seventh century?—Where was the doctrine of image-worship before the second Council of Nice, in the eighth century?—Where was the mass offered, as a sacrifice propitiatory for sin, before the doctrine of the real presence, which only began to be propagated in the ninth century?—Where was the doctrine of transubstantiation before the Council of Lateran, in the thirteenth century?—Where was the elevation of the host, before Honorius III., in the thirteenth century?—Where was the doctrine of indulgences and jubilees, before Boniface VIII., in the same century?—Or where was their communion in one kind, before their sacrilegious Council of Constance, in the fifteenth century?

"These are all novelties; and, as such, they cannot stand the test of the Bible. These are all novelties; and, as such, they are not to be found in any of the three creeds. They are not to be found in the Apostles' creed, which was formed in the latter end of the first century. They are not to be found in the Nicene Creed, which was adopted by the Greek and Latin Churches in the fourth century. Nor are they to be found in the celebrated Athanasian Creed, which was universally received by all the Christian Churches.

"Where, then, are they to be found? I will tell you, my brethren. They are to be found in the Creed of Pope Pius IV., that made its appearance in the sixteenth century! Talk, then, of the old re-

ligion! talk of the ancient faith! talk of the religion of your forefathers! Where is this religion to be found? In the Creed of Pope Pius IV. When was this creed formed? In the sixteenth century. Hear it, Roman Catholics; your religion cannot be traced further back than the seventeenth century, and is a mere composition of the various heresies that made their appearance at different ages of the Church, and were stitched together, about one hundred and eighty years ago, by one of the Popes of Rome."

THE END.

ELECTROTYPED BY L. JOHNSON & CO.
PHILADELPHIA.